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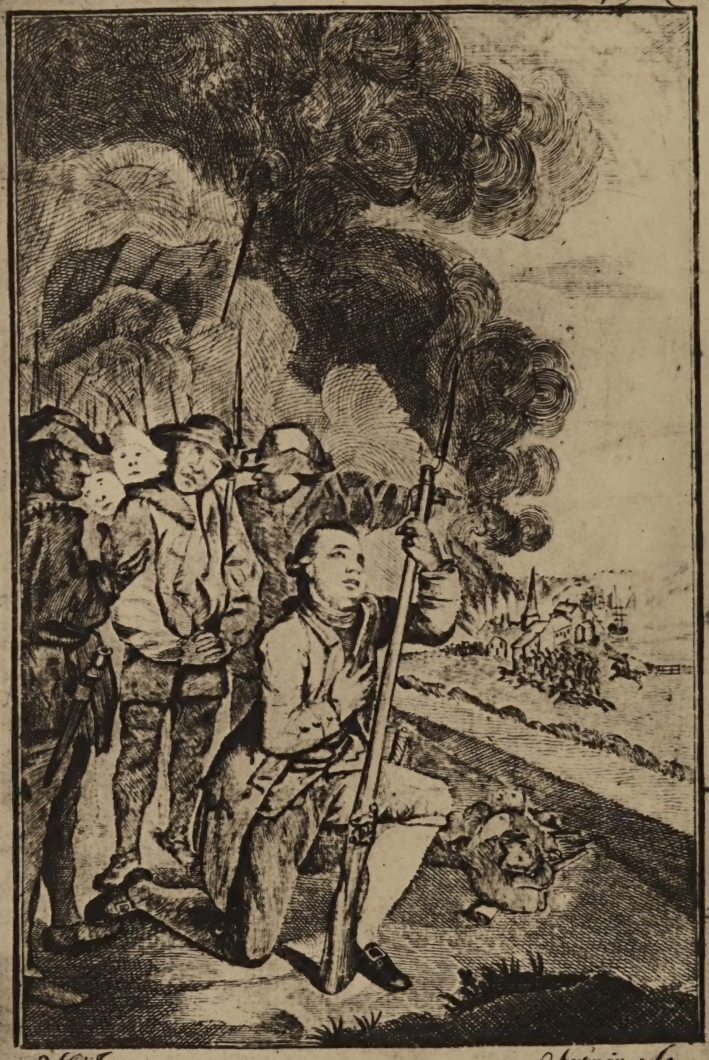
Bunker Hill

Frontispiece. page 28



J. G. Inv. Norman Sc.

THE DEATH OF WARREN

BUNKER HILL

Notes and *Queries* on a Famous Battle

By

HAROLD MURDOCK

Illustrated

BOSTON

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Preface

I AM indebted to the Massachusetts Historical Society and to the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, before whom these essays were read, for permission to publish them in collected form. They have all been revised and the one on the British Attack has been expanded and largely rewritten. This was made necessary by the large amount of new material that has recently become accessible in England. The Headquarters Papers of Sir Henry Clinton, recently purchased by Mr. W. L. Clements, the generous friend of the University of Michigan, will soon be at the disposal of scholars, and by courtesy of the owner and of Mr. Adams, his librarian at Ann Arbor, I have been favored with a glimpse of certain documents very important to my purpose. Moreover, Mr. Allen French has kept me in touch with his work in the archives and private collections in England and has most generously placed at my disposal such fruits of his research as have to do with Bunker Hill. I cannot too strongly express my obligation and gratitude for his friendly assistance. Rumor has it that the Gage Papers, long sequestered at Firle, are soon to be published with competent editing. Until this is done, the British official evidence, considerable as it is, must be regarded as incomplete.

My

My rambling discussions of men and events presuppose some familiarity with the subject on the part of the reader. I have not, for instance, re-described in detail the topography of the battle-field. Since I have confined myself throughout to contemporaneous authorities, many familiar and long-cherished legends do not appear in what I have to say on the American Defence. Even in my simple version, however, the narrative remains a strange, brave record of achievement that may well stir the blood of any New-Englander whatever his percentage of Americanism. It is possible that valuable material bearing upon the activities of the Provincials at Bunker Hill lies yet undiscovered among unsorted documents in the possession of old families and in the garrets of historic houses, but the case is one for hope rather than for confidence.

Historians will find here some new material hitherto unpublished, and in this and in the inferences I have drawn from it there may be something worthy of their consideration. It may be, also, that these notes and queries will prove interesting to the general reader in the field of history. As the author found real amusement in writing of the Reverend John Martin and of the legend of the Fusiliers, he trusts that his enjoyment may prove in some measure contagious. Moreover, these two essays point again the moral, familiar to all modern historians, that even contemporaneous evidence cannot, without careful scrutiny, be safely accepted at its face value.

Contents

I. The British Attack 1

II. The American Defence 37

III. The Reverend Peter Thacher's Report to the Committee of Safety 81

IV. The Remarkable Story of the Reverend John Martin 97

V. The Sensitiveness of General Clinton 119

VI. The Myth of the Royal Welch Fusiliers 135

Appendix 145

Illustrations

The Death of Warren *Frontispiece*

From the print by Norman in Brackenridge's drama of Bunker Hill published in Philadelphia, 1776.

Charlestown Heights from Copp's Hill . . 12

From an old print showing the ruins of Charlestown and part of the British camp.

Broadside — Bunker's Hill. A New Song . . 28

Reproduced from the original which was once the property of Lieut. Frederick Mackenzie of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The song is supposed to have been written by a British soldier, and, with omissions, additions, and various alterations, was frequently reprinted in America during the eighteenth century.

Boston from Breed's Hill 54

From a print in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, June, 1791

Two Military Documents written and signed by John Stark and William Prescott . . . 64

Autograph Order of General Artemas Ward, dated June 16, 1775 76

Part of the 'Preamble' of the Rev. Peter Thacher, showing Erasure 86

From the original document in the cabinet of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester.

Rev. Ezra Stiles 100

From an old print by Doolittle.

General

General Sir Henry Clinton 122
From a stipple print by Bartolozzi

'A Plan of the Action at Bunker's Hill on the 17th of June 1775 . . . By Lieut. Page of the Engineers' 150
From a reduced facsimile of the original British map.

Except where otherwise stated the originals of these illustrations are in the possession of the author.

Bunker Hill

I

THE BRITISH ATTACK

Bunker Hill

I

THE BRITISH ATTACK

A REASONABLE understanding of what our ancestors achieved on the 17th of June, 1775, can best be attained if we are informed as to the numbers and behavior, the plans and mistakes, of their adversaries. I propose, therefore, in the first of these discussions of certain aspects of the Battle of Bunker Hill to concentrate upon the excellent British evidence that is now accessible. A study of this material reveals something of the atmosphere of Boston on the morning of the battle and enables us to trace the development of the military measures that culminated in the attack on the Breed's Hill lines.

While the army in Boston was regarded as a good army, well officered and equipped for the service it was expected to perform, it is evident that between the 19th of April and the 17th of June there had been some deterioration in its morale, and a serious impairment of its health. Restricted to the narrow boundaries of the town, badly quartered, inactive, with a shortage of fresh provisions, mentally and bodily the army was just beginning to feel the inconvenience of the siege. After the Concord fiasco, Gage lay upon his arms,

arms, nonplussed by the situation and awaiting the arrival of reinforcements. A larger force was a necessity of the situation, yet he knew that unless the expected accessions were sufficient to disperse his besiegers, they would only add to the congestion in the town and render more acute the problems of subsistence.

On May 6, there arrived from Halifax four companies of the 65th Regiment.* On the 14th, a transport came in with a detachment of Marines, the first installment of a reinforcement of six hundred for that corps.† With the Marines then serving in the town, the newcomers were incorporated into two provisional regiments or battalions of ten companies each, to serve under Major Pitcairn; as witness his orders of May 20.‡

These two detachments were the first reinforcements to arrive after the 19th of April. On May 25th, the Cerberus came in with the three Major Generals aboard, Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne, and in the interval between that date and the 17th of June there also arrived the 17th Regiment of Light Dragoons (Preston's) and the 35th, 49th, and 63rd Regiments of Foot. This infantry was still in the process of landing on the 17th of June, and a portion of the 35th and 49th were still at sea.

* Two companies of this regiment were already in Boston, having arrived in the Rose man-of-war from Newfoundland, October 12, 1774.

† Diary of Lieutenant John Barker, *The British in Boston* (Cambridge, 1924), p. 47. The balance of the 600 appears to have landed on May 23 (*id.*, p. 50).

‡ Printed in S. A. Drake's *Bunker Hill. The Story told in letters . . . by British officers engaged* (Boston, 1875), pp. 74–75.

It

It is possible then to determine from reliable British records the various commands that were serving in Boston at the moment that the Lively opened fire upon the redoubt on Breed's Hill. They consisted of the 4th, 5th, 10th, 23rd, 38th, 43rd, 47th, 52nd, and 59th Regiments of Foot as well as the greater part of the 35th, 49th, and 63rd just off the ships.* There were also the First and Second Battalions of Marines, the 17th Light Dragoons, and five companies of the Royal Artillery. To these should be added what was known as the "Incorporated Corps," a provisional regiment made up of three companies of the 18th Regiment† and six companies of the 65th. At the Castle was the 64th Regiment, which was not included in the activities of the Boston garrison, and is not mentioned in Howe's orders until October, 1775. With this knowledge of the composition of the army, it is possible to make a reasonably close computation of its numerical strength.

I have seen only one official return giving the strength of the Boston garrison during the period of Gage's command. It is in the Library of the War Of-

* The 22nd Regiment is included in the garrison by many American writers. The blunder is undoubtedly due to the appearance of Colonel Abercrombie's name in the death-roll of Bunker Hill. Abercrombie arrived in Boston on special duty in the spring, was appointed Adjutant and later to command the Corps of Grenadiers. He did not live to rejoin his regiment, which landed in Boston late in July.

† These three companies of the 18th (Royal Irish) arrived from New York on October 23, 1774. (Diary of Thomas Newell. See Frothingham's *Siege of Boston*, pp. 363–64.)

fice

fice in London, dated October 26, 1774,* and shows an aggregate for the nine regiments of 3213 rank and file, or an average of 357 for each as against the full quota of 390.† A deduction of 224 is made in the document for the sick, and 358 for servants, musicians, men absent on furlough, recruiting, etc., leaving an effective strength of 2631, or 292 to a regiment. I propose to use this thoroughly reliable return as the basis for our estimate, as there is no reason to suppose that the strength of the army in October could have varied materially from that of the following June. The number of recruits arriving from England and Ireland in the eight-months period had been inconsiderable, while on the other hand we must reckon with the heavy mortality which marked the sickly winter of 1774–75 and the casualties of the 19th of April. I think we may be sure that in accepting the return in the War Office Library we are running no risk of understating the strength of the Boston garrison in June. As for the artillery and cavalry, we have Howe's figures of October 1, 1775. We find then that the total strength on paper of Gage's command works out as follows:

* This is a copy of a headquarters document in the handwriting of Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie, Adjutant of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The figures he gives are confirmed in another document in the British Museum manuscript collection, probably transcribed from official data, catalogued as Addit. 29256 A–29259 L–. Here the average effective strength of the same nine regiments on July 1, 1775, is given as 275 men, after deducting the killed at Bunker Hill and including several shiploads of recruits and drafts which arrived just before and after that affair.

† A number never attained in Boston except in the case of the Marines, where it was clearly exceeded.

12 Regiments

12 Regiments of 360 men	4320
2 Battalions of Marines of 500 men	1000
Incorporated Corps; 9 Companies 18th & 65th Regiments	324
Dragoons (Howe's return October 1)	207
Artillery (Howe's return October 1)	214
64th Regiment at the Castle	360
Or a total rank and file of	6425

Perhaps, in the presence of the three Major Generals, fresh from the battlefields of Parliament, Gage realized that his days were short in his present command; but he was tired of his task and disgusted with the recalcitrant people whom he had honestly hoped to serve. He had tried argument, persuasion, and force, and had failed in each. If the magic name of Howe, the iron hand of Clinton, or the cultivated blandishments of Burgoyne could bring order out of the present chaos, I believe that Gage was ready, nay, eager, to resign his trust.

But for instructions from London, Gage would have omitted his proclamation declaring martial law in the Province and offering free pardon to all rebels save John Hancock and Samuel Adams. He doubtless had competent assistance in its preparation. At all events, there are sentences in the document which suggest that they were written by Burgoyne and not by Gage. It required no outside hint to convince the General that the occupation of the Charlestown peninsula and Dorchester Neck was necessary for the safety of Boston. He had been restrained from a move upon either by the insufficiency

insufficiency of his force. He had warned the selectmen of Charlestown that any invasion of the peninsula by the rebel army would be followed promptly by the destruction of the town. This he had hoped would act as a sufficient deterrent to any hostile move in that quarter. With the arrival of reinforcements he determined to put his long delayed project into effect and to occupy Dorchester Neck. According to Burgoyne in a letter to Lord Stanley the affair was planned for June 18. "*Howe* was to land the transports on the Point, *Clinton* in the centre; and I was to cannonade from the *Causeway* or the *Neck:* each to take advantage of circumstances. The operations must have been very easy."*

But at daybreak on the 17th the roar of the Lively's guns awoke Gage, as it did all Boston, and he had hardly time to rise from his bed before an officer came running up the steps of the Province House with the message that the rebels were entrenched on Charlestown Heights.

Perhaps we can spare a moment, before becoming involved in a dry, statistical discussion, to linger in the hall of the Governor's mansion and mark the awakening activity in the military world. Sleepy-eyed aides and orderlies appear as if by magic and depart on urgent errands, candles begin to twinkle in the dusk of the council chamber, while through the open door the glow of the coming day flames red above the trees beyond the lawn. The hall is filling with eager officers anxious

* Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1094–95.

for

for duty: Burgoyne comes jauntily, with a polite smile for all, but with his heart bitter in the thought that no glory is awaiting him in the presence of three officers of superior rank; Howe arrives, his majestic figure towering above the rest, his swarthy face hard and grim, in marked contrast to Clinton of the benign and placid countenance; Pigot, of the lion heart and diminutive body, appears and disappears among those of loftier port; and here, too, is Percy, breathing quick after a brisk walk from his house at the head of Winter Street. Then, behind closed doors, while the windows rattle to the cannonading in the Charles, and the clock on the Old South across the way clangs out the passing hours, the Council of War enters soberly upon the business of the day.

We have no certain information as to the composition of this Council or any details of its deliberations.* We must assume that the General had no satisfactory map of Charlestown. He had not taken the precaution to secure surveys, and Montresor's careful work is of a later date. Doubtless the Council understood the problem as it then existed. Between sunset and sunrise an entrenchment had been thrown up on the hill above Charlestown village. Bunker Hill beyond had not been fortified, and the menace was confined to the work on the nearer and lesser height.

There must have been officers present who exulted

* Mr. Frothingham names General Grant as being present. That officer did not arrive in Boston until late in July. See Howe's *Orderly Book* (London, 1890), p. 57.

in

in the consciousness that the rebels had placed themselves in a hopeless dilemma and who recalled the adage that "whom the gods would destroy they first make mad." It is alleged that Clinton urged a landing from Charles River in the vicinity of the Neck. Burgoyne's assurance that Clinton, Howe, and himself had "never differed one jot of military sentiment" * may mean that the trio were in accord on this occasion. Had Lord Clive sat in Gage's chair, we can imagine the grim smile with which he would have received the news that the enemy in their water-girdled outpost had delivered themselves into his hands. But Gage was not Clive, and, rightly or wrongly, he is credited with opposing Clinton's plan.† The objections that developed to any descent upon the Neck were doubtless based upon sound military convention, but the more elastic minds probably argued that peculiar situations could not be met by rigid rule. They probably urged that the rebels, however numerous, were undisciplined and poorly equipped, and would be helpless against trained troops in the open field. A small force, supported by

* Letter to Lord Stanley. Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1094–95.

† There is now at Highcliffe Castle in Hants, an unpublished memorandum, drawn up later in the war by the Honorable Charles Stuart for his father, Lord Bute, in which he seems to lay the responsibility for the plan of attack upon Howe — "Had Gen^{l} Howe recollected a military maxim that cuting off a Retreat is half a Victory he in all probability would have possessed Charles Town neck with a considerable Corps of troops." Stuart was at this time a captain in the 35th and landed the day after the battle. He was one of the most brilliant of the younger officers and had a distinguished career before him. His intimate relations with his superiors at Headquarters make him in most matters a valuable authority.

artillery,

artillery, could hold the Neck against all comers, while the men in the redoubt, cut off from retreat and supports, must either languish in their isolation or come out and fight at a disadvantage.* The army had been yearning to meet these people in a fair stand-up engagement, and no one could deny that the Charlestown peninsula was singularly bare of cover and of trees. For nearly one hundred and fifty years the consensus of military opinion has been that the plan ascribed to Clinton met the requirements of the case. It was finally decided that the men-of-war should cover a landing of the troops in Charlestown to the east of the ferry, and that armed vessels and gondolas† should lie in the Charles and enfilade the Neck to retard reinforcements and impede a retreat. But even so, it is not necessary to assume that a decision had been made to attack the redoubt in front, or that the sentiment that is said to have appeared among the officers in the field, to "take the bull by the horns,"‡ was a creation of the Council of War. The

* "Had we intended to have taken the whole rebel army prisoners, we needed only to have landed in their rear and occupied the high ground above Bunker's- [Breed's] hill. By this movement we shut them up in the peninsula as in a bag, with their rear exposed to the fire of our cannon, and, if we pleased, our musquetry: in short, they must have surrendered instantly or been blown to pieces." (Letter of an officer in Boston, in *Detail and Conduct of the American War*, 3rd ed., London, 1780, p. 13, reprinted in *Historical Magazine*, June, 1868, p. 368.) This letter, frequently cited in this book, was one of the evidences upon which General Howe based his request for a Parliamentary investigation. Charles Stuart, in his memorandum quoted in the previous note, was of the opinion that this course "would without the loss of a man brought them to terms."

† The gondola was a small gunboat, musket-proof, and mounting a heavy piece of cannon.

‡ *Historical Magazine* (June, 1868), pp. 367–68. All references in my landing

landing was to be made at Moulton's Point at the mouth of the Mystic, the most distant point from the redoubt, and the clear intent was to advance along the river out of range of that work, with a view to occupying a position on the flank and well to the rear of its defenders. Thus, it was probably argued, Clinton's principal aim might still be achieved; and it must be remembered that when the Council broke up, and for some hours thereafter, there was not a Provincial soldier to impede the British march along the bank of the Mystic straight to the summit of Bunker Hill. The New Hampshire troops were then loafing about their camps in Medford, while Knowlton and his handful of Connecticut men were still toiling on the redoubt. The one incomprehensible blunder of the Council was their neglect to provide naval support for the attack they had planned. The ships in the Charles and in the harbor were of no value to a column advancing along the Mystic shore. A flood tide was running strong up that river and all things favored naval co-operation on that side. What the Council might have provided from the motive of "making assurance doubly sure" developed later into a vital necessity of the situation.

To Howe, as the senior Major General, fell the duty of commanding the landing force, and "at 7 o'clock the Grenadiers and Light Infantry, had orders to keep

footnotes to this magazine are to the number of that date. Charles Stuart states that the expression quoted arose *after* the battle when the heavy losses were revealed. "The vulgar expression through the whole Army was that we had taken the Bull by the Horns."

in

Charlestown Heights from Copp's Hill

in readiness."* By nine o'clock the Battery on Copp's Hill had opened fire on the redoubt. The ships were still engaged and according to his own statement, Admiral Graves† was a very busy man. Accompanied by Howe he went aboard the Somerset, which had dropped down the stream from her old anchorage between Charlestown and Boston, "intending if possible to have had that ship warped in to cover the Landing but there was not sufficient depth of Water." Then he concluded that his large ships "could give no other assistance than that of lending Boats, Men, Ammunition and other Stores to the small which was done."‡ We are indebted to Graves for our only definite information as to the naval force employed at Bunker Hill. The Glasgow, which had just come off the ways, bombarded Charlestown Neck from a point well up the Charles River,§ as did the Symmetry, armed

* Barker, p. 60.

† Thomas Graves was appointed to command on the North American station in 1774. On May 26, he was saluted by the ships in the harbor on being promoted to Vice-Admiral of the White. There was much friction between him and the military authorities in Boston, and he is freely criticized in the correspondence of Percy, Rawdon, Burgoyne, and other officers. Whatever his shortcomings, the truth seems to be that he was sent out with an inadequate force, that his ships were undermanned even for peace conditions, and that he lacked light craft capable of operating against the Americans in shallow waters. He was superseded in January, 1776. The comments which I quote from him are contained in the "Conduct of Vice-Adm[l] R. Graves in America 1774–6," a manuscript written in his hand and now in the British Museum.

‡ The Admiral adds in his manuscript, "Two officers and thirty six Seamen were sent from the Somerset to the Symmetry armed Transport and twenty Seamen to the Falcon, to reinforce those Vessels. The Preston manned the Spitfire Sloop of Six 3 pounders, and provided her with Ammunition."

§ Probably off Barton's Point, or just above the present East Cambridge bridge.

transport,

transport, at closer range. A half dozen scows or gondolas, each mounting a twelve-pounder, were towed close in shore to assist in the operations but it was upon the small sloops, Lively, Falcon, and Spitfire, which lay "abreast of and below Charlestown," that devolved the task of covering the landing and bombarding the redoubt. Lord Rawdon tells us * that the work of these three vessels was ineffective, not only because of the lightness of their batteries, but because the guns could not be elevated sufficiently to bear upon their target. Four twenty-four pounders from the Artillery Park were sent to the Copp's Hill Battery, but the distance was too great and the redoubt too strong for even this heavier ordnance to produce the desired result.

If you read the General Orders for the 17th of June, you will find that the troops assigned to Howe comprised all the Light Infantry and Grenadiers and the Second Brigade under General Pigot made up of the 5th, 38th, 43rd, and 52nd Regiments. "The 10 Eldest Companys of Grenadiers and the 10 Eldest Companys of Light Infantry † (Exclusive of those Regts lately landed)" were to embark from the Long Wharf with the 5th and 38th Regiments. The remaining companies of Grenadiers and Light Infantry, with the 43rd and 52nd Regiments, were to enter their boats at the North Battery. These troops were ordered "to

* Unpublished letter to the Earl of Huntington dated June 20, 1775, in the Hastings collection.

† The organization and status of the Grenadiers and Light Infantry is explained on a later page.

parade

parade at Half after 11 o'clock with their Arms, Ammunition, Blanketts and the provisions Order'd." It was provided that a subaltern, sergeant, corporal, drummer, and twenty privates from each corps should be left "for the Security of their respective Encampments."

It was further ordered that, upon the embarkation of this force, the 47th Regiment and the First Battalion of Marines should march to the North Battery "and be ready to Embark there when Order'd," or, in other words, stand in reserve.

We come now to the consideration of the strength of Howe's command, which has long been the subject of much unintelligent surmise. I shall figure that the regiments took the field with an average strength of 270 rank and file. My estimate is based upon the effective regimental strength as given in the report of October 26, 1774, already cited, after deducting twenty men from each corps for the encampment guard. While sickness had much increased since the previous fall, no allowance is made for that. Absolute accuracy being impossible, our aim must be to ascertain Howe's possible maximum strength. There came, then, to the Long Wharf:*

	At
20 companies, Grenadiers and Light Infantry, of 32 men	640
The 5th and 38th Battalions, 16 companies of 26 men	416
Or a total of	1056

* Relying on scattered regimental data I have, except in the case of the Marines, figured the average strength of the flank companies as 32 men and the

At the North Battery had gathered the 43rd and 52nd Battalions and the remaining companies of Grenadiers and Light Infantry, or, those of the First and Second Battalions of Marines and of the 35th and 63rd Regiments.* The 49th was not represented because its flank companies were still at sea. For some reason, perhaps a shortage of boats, the flank companies of the 35th were the only ones to embark with the battalions from the Battery.† We should therefore estimate the detachment leaving this point as follows:

The 43rd and 52nd Battalions, 16 companies of 26 men	416
35th Regiment, 2 companies Grenadiers and Light Infantry	64
Or a total of	480

Thus we have, in round numbers, a force of 1500 men under Howe's command landing at Moulton's Point under cover of the fire of the ships.

the battalion companies as 26. My computation for a regiment is therefore, 64 for the flank companies, 208 for the battalion, a total of 272. It seems to have been customary to augment what was known as "the flower of the army" at the expense of the battalions.

* Dawson names these flank companies as those of the 18th, 22nd, and 63rd Regiments. He did not know that the Marine battalions were organized with Grenadiers and Light Infantry. The 18th Regiment, as we have seen, consisted of only three companies serving in the Incorporated Corps. Their losses in the field doubtless fell upon men drafted to fill up the flank companies of the 65th, also serving with the Incorporated Corps. The 22nd, as stated in a previous note, was not in Boston. The mention of the 63rd marks the full measure of Dawson's accuracy.

† Howe in his report to Gage mentions only the twenty "eldest" flank companies as crossing with the first detachment. De Berniere on his map adds those of the 35th. The losses in these two companies, amounting almost to annihilation, would indicate that they were in the fighting at the fence. The point is, of course, of trifling importance.

When

When the 47th Regiment and the Marines came swinging down to the Battery to the music of their fifes and drums, they were doubtless surprised to find six of the flank companies that had been assigned to Howe's landing force still awaiting transportation. Including this remnant of the first detachment, we must compute the strength of the reserve in some such way as this:

47th Battalion, 8 companies of 26 men	208
First Battalion of Marines (complete), 10 companies of 38 men	380
Second Battalion of Marines, 2 companies Grenadiers and Light Infantry of 38 men	76
63rd Regiment, 2 companies Grenadiers and Light Infantry of 32 men	64
Or a total of	728

There was, then, including the reserve, a force of less than 2300 men placed at Howe's command. This is not in conflict with Gage's official statement, "the whole when in conjunction making a body of something above 2000 men." American estimates of the British strength naturally ran into all sorts of extravagance, and were as wild, indeed, as British guesses as to the force of their adversaries. Men were found "who counted the troops as they left the wharves in Boston," with results ranging from 3500 to 5000 men. I can conceive of no more unreliable evidence than this, but it is true that many worthy and able historians have harbored the suspicion that, both as to numbers and losses, Gage falsified his returns. "Neither British accounts, nor the British plans of the battle," says Frothingham, "mention all the

the regiments that were in the field. Thus, the movements of the second battalion of marines are not given; yet the official table of loss states that it had seven killed and thirty wounded."*

Before commenting specifically upon this assertion, I wish to say a word upon a problem that in one way or another has confused our most intelligent writers. Their doubts and perplexities have been largely due to a lack of understanding of the composition of a British regiment of the day and of the peculiar status and functions of its companies of Grenadiers and Light Infantry.

The regiments serving in America at the time consisted of ten companies, including one of Grenadiers and one of Light Infantry which were commonly known as the flank companies, from their position in the line, and consisted of picked men. It was the custom, when regiments were brigaded, to detach these companies and to form them into provisional battalions for special service. The flank companies in Boston were embodied in two separate corps on June 4, and if we had been in the town during the following day, we might have visited the two new encampments, where we should have found Colonel Abercrombie commanding the Grenadiers, and Colonel Clark in charge of the Light Infantry. By this process the line regiments were reduced to battalions of eight companies each. A curious anomaly existed in the military bookkeeping that

* *Siege*, p. 191.

is

is responsible for much of the confusion in scholarly minds. Losses suffered in action by the two corps were not assigned to the corps, but to the regiment which carried the victim upon its rolls.

Now Mr. Frothingham understood this problem, but he was not aware that the Marine battalions were organized on the same basis as the line regiments, with companies of Grenadiers and Light Infantry. The Second Marines was not in the action, but its flank companies, in common with those of every other regiment, were engaged, and that is why the parent battalion appears as a sufferer in the action.* Every regiment in Boston suffered casualties at Bunker Hill, and yet the fact remains that only six regiments had more than two companies engaged. A mastery of this problem should convince the most doubting Thomas that the British reports are reliable and that Gage as a statistician was neither a knave nor a fool.

The very best British information that exists on the battle is to be found in two maps. The first is by Lieu-

* The 63rd Battalion and the Second Marines were sent over by Gage toward the close of the action, but Howe in his report to Gage states that they arrived too late to participate in the fighting. Major Tupper of the Second Marines crossed with the reserve, having been, as he tells us, ordered from his battalion to serve under Major Pitcairn in the field. Pitcairn being dead and Major Short of the First Battalion fatally ill of the flux, it devolved upon Tupper to make the Marine report to the Admiralty. The document is now in the Records Office in London, and from it we gain our first authentic information as to the circumstances of Pitcairn's death. "He was wounded," says Tupper, "a few minutes before the Attack was made on the Redoubt, and he died about two or three hours after." This disposes of numerous legends which assign his fall to the parapet, and renders his appearance in Trumbull's famous painting an anachronism.

tenant

tenant Page,* who was Howe's staff engineer on the field, and based his details on Captain Montresor's admirable survey of the peninsula. It appeared in London in 1777. The other, first published in the *Analectic Magazine* in 1818, is from a sketch by Lieutenant de Berniere, whose abilities as a draughtsman were held in such high esteem by Gage.† The sketch itself was found among the Lieutenant's papers after the British evacuation ot Philadelphia. Although based upon the work of a British officer, the map is said to be the first to be engraved in America of the Battle of Bunker Hill. It lacks the geographical accuracy of Page's work, but is of great value as showing the disposition and movements of certain military units not depicted on the other. The maps differ in certain minor details, but agree in all essential matters.‡

It is probable that Howe was landing on Moulton's Point between one and two o'clock, and a little later, he stood, with his 1500 men drawn up in three lines, on

* Sir Thomas Hyde Page (1746–1821) was appointed Lieutenant of the Royal Engineers in 1774. He served on Howe's staff at Bunker Hill, where he was wounded. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1783 and was knighted the same year in recognition of his distinguished military services. In 1784 he was transferred to the invalid corps of the Engineers. He published several important works on professional subjects between 1784 and 1801. A portrait of him by Sir Joshua Reynolds is in existence.

† He executed orders in February, 1775, "to go through the counties of Suffolk and Worcester, and sketch the roads as we went, for the information of Gen. Gage." See General Gage's Instructions, etc., 2 *Massachusetts Historical Collections*, IV, 205.

‡ These differences do not affect alignments, but the positions of regiments in the line are transposed. For example, one map shows the 47th on the extreme left, the other has the Marines in that position with the 47th on their right. De Berniere follows Howe's report throughout.

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the little hill as indicated on Page's map. Somewhat in advance, eight field guns are portrayed in action, which accords with Cleaveland's statement that four light 6-pounders, four light 12-pounders, and four 5½-inch howitzers were landed with the detachment. To the defenders of the redoubt the troops seemed in no haste to enter upon the business of the day. Howe's first move was to throw forward four companies of Light Infantry where, close to the Mystic, Page shows them as they stood sheltered by "a break in the ground." Two Battalions under Pigot's direction moved across the Charlestown road and took a position about two hundred yards southeast of the redoubt, where they formed the left wing "covered by the rising of the Hill." This detachment appears on Page's map with its left refused, in deference to the fire from Charlestown. The artillery was then pushed forward into the wide gap between these outposts, and Page represents seven guns in action, with their fire directed upon the breast-work and the lightly protected line running at half right angles to it.

This was Howe's first position. He was cautiously feeling his way instead of advancing boldly over the open land in front. These preliminaries were doubtless due to a remarkable thing that had occurred. A body of Provincials, with intuitions born of common sense and of their Indian instinct for finding or creating cover, seized upon the line of a fence-topped stone wall that extended from a point in the rear of the redoubt to the shore of the Mystic, and by singularly rapid methods proceeded

proceeded to convert it into one of the famous ramparts of all time, which has gone down in American history by the name of "the rail fence." In an incredibly short time, the open land sloping up to Bunker Hill had become obstructed by a defensive line, the problem considered by the Council of War had entirely changed its character, and Howe's contemplated advance was challenged and opposed.

Was Howe dilatory? Was it owing to his inertia or indecision that a golden opportunity was thus allowed to pass? In view of our confusion as to time at this crisis, he is probably entitled to a verdict of not proven, and it must of course be remembered that the debarkation of a large body of troops from small boats and their ordering for attack is both a difficult and a complicated piece of business. Moreover, his seeming sluggishness may have all been due to the fact that he had sent to Boston for his reserve and was determined to await its arrival before beginning the attack.* He had certainly intended to divert the defenders of the redoubt while giving them a wide berth, but as he stood waiting at Moulton's Point, he had seen the redoubt come down to the Mystic.

No wonder that he sent to Boston for his reserve. At this critical moment Admiral Graves reappears upon the scene. He went ashore, he tells us, "to be near General Howe for the sake of seeing whether any further aid could be given." Finding the General worried by

* The Committee of Safety has it that Howe's "brigade" stood waiting "till a second detachment arrived from Boston to join them." The remark doubtless refers to the reserve.

Pigot's

Pigot's assertion that he could not advance against the works until Charlestown had been cleared of the enemy, Graves inquired "if he wished to have the place burned." On receiving an affirmative response, the Admiral "immediately sent to the Ships to fire red hot Balls (which had been prepared with that View) and also to Copse Hill Battery to desire they would throw Carcasses into the Town."* There is no evidence to show that the General requested or that the Admiral offered any naval support in the Mystic to meet the new situation. To be sure, the afternoon was wearing on and perhaps it was too late to bring round those gondolas operating so ineffectively in the Charles, a few shots from which on the Mystic side would have rendered the line of the rail fence untenable.† Perhaps Howe held lightly the

* There was much conflicting gossip in 1775 as to the time that Charlestown was fired, estimates varying from ten o'clock in the morning to some hours after the battle. The real facts are now clear. Graves's evidence, conclusive in itself, is confirmed by the Report of the Committee of Safety, which states that it was at the "instant" the British began their advance. General Heath says, "at the time the British made their attack"; Barker, "just about the beginning of the attack"; I. Waller, an officer on a British ship, "when the attack was first made." (Letter in my possession.)

† "Had we only wanted to drive them from their ground, without the loss of a man, the Cymetry, transport, which drew little water and mounted eighteen nine-pounders, could have been towed up the Mystic channel, and brought to within musket-shot of their left flank, which was quite naked; and she could have lain, water-borne, at the lowest ebb tide; or, one of our covered boats, musket-proof, carrying a heavy piece of cannon, might have been rowed close in, and one charge on their uncovered flank would have dislodged them in a second" (letter in Detail and Conduct of the American War). That Graves felt himself under criticism in the matter is suggested by his comment "as this affair was sudden and unexpected there was no time for constructing floating Batteries, or Rafts of real Service, as any such would have been a work of some days." On the other hand, Barker tells

the crude shelter that had sprung up so suddenly in his front. Perhaps he was influenced by the enthusiasm of his officers and the shouts that arose from the ranks to "push on!"*

But even then, with his reserve forming on the beach midway between Charlestown Village and Moulton's Point, Howe hoped to avoid attacking the hostile lines in front. His purpose was still to steal round the Provincial flank by the Mystic beach and to drive through his demoralized enemy in force as soon as they realized that they were caught between two fires.† De Berniere shows clearly the long thin column of Light Infantry moving along the Mystic shore, each company indicated by its regimental number. Page reveals by dotted lines an advance on a broader front along the same route, illustrative, according to his key, of "the Order our Troops would probably have Attack'd in, had our Light Infantry been able to penetrate." The interlocking evidence of the two maps confirms Howe's avowed intent, and then Page indicates the next move

tells us (p. 62) that three of these small craft went up the Mystic on the 18th, the day after the battle. His comment is interesting: "had these boats been with us on Saturday at the time of the Attack they could have been of great use, as they wou'd have taken a part of the Rebels intrenchment in flank and in their retreat wou'd have cut off numbers; instead of that they were on the other side and of no manner of use."

* Unpublished letter of Lord Rawdon to the Earl of Huntington, dated June 20, 1775, in the Hastings collection.

† Howe's own statement is as follows, "the light infantry upon the right were directed to keep along the beach, and to form on the left point of the rebels breastwork, and then to take their Line in flank, the grenadiers being directed to attack it in front, supported by the 5th and 52nd." These two battalions were on the left of the Grenadiers in front of the breastwork.

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and the reverse that occasioned it: "Grenadiers taking Ground on the Left of the Light Infantry which had not been able to force the enemy."

This attempt of the Light Infantry was clearly a prologue to the battle, and it was its disastrous issue that involved Howe at last in the problems and perils of a front attack upon positions defended, as he believed, by a force three times as great as his own. We have few details of what occurred in this part of the field. We know that the light companies, instead of gaining their objective in the rear of the American line, found their way opposed, were met by a close and murderous fire, and recoiled in disorder. We must assume that the disaster converted what was perhaps intended as a mere demonstration on the part of the Grenadiers into a serious attack upon the fence. Howe asserts in his report to Gage that he could have stormed the American position "with little loss" had it not been for certain high, strong fences that stood between the contending forces and formed a sort of abatis in front of the well-chosen American position. These obstructions could not be passed or thrown down in the face of the hostile fire and effectually "prevented the troops rushing on with their bayonets."* It is certain that on the narrow belt of ground,

* Howe's statement should be read in connection with the following sweeping criticism of his tactics contained in the letter in the *Detail and Conduct of the War:* "Our manner of attacking in front was ruinous. In advancing not a shot should have been fired, as it retarded the troops whose movement should have been as rapid as possible. They should not have been brought up in line, but in columns, with Light-infantry in the intervals,

ground, which lay between the rail fence and the line marked on Page's map as Howe's second position, was staged the most sanguinary fighting of the day, and, as Howe's force on this front did not at its maximum exceed seven hundred men, we must conclude that his fruitless and wasteful offensive could not have been long maintained. He was beaten to a standstill, on the bank as on the beach; he had suffered terrible loss, and his entire staff had been shot down about him. He was a specialist in Light Infantry tactics, he had invented certain new evolutions which he had taught at the Salisbury camp in 1774,* and yet it is evident that in his handling of the light troops at Bunker Hill he did not, perhaps could not, practice what he had preached in England the year before.†

For the third time Howe seems to have shifted his plans when he began his concentration against the redoubt and breastwork. Perhaps it was in connection with this manœuvre that another misfortune occurred to try his soul. It was whispered on high authority that his orders were so badly conceived or so clumsily exe-

vals, to keep up a smart fire against the top of the breastwork. If this had been done, their works would have been carried in three minutes, and not a tenth part of our present loss." Howe asserted that the fences formed an obstruction along the whole front. Some of them appear on Page's map as impediments to Howe's attack, but in front of Pigot the ground shows clear.

* See J. F. C. Fuller's *British Light Infantry in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 125, and appendix.

† Some of the light companies who had not been involved in the disaster on the beach seem to have co-operated with the Grenadiers in their attack.

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cuted as to create a confusion in which certain British units suffered losses by the fire of their comrades.*

It is to be noted that, with the exception of the Light Infantry, the troops were all brought up in line, firing as they advanced. They were in heavy marching order, each man encumbered with a superfluous weight estimated at nearly one hundred pounds. They made their way through stout standing grass that reached to their waists, and through, over, and under strong fences that impeded their progress and broke up their formations. We are informed that the infantry were halted from time to time in their slow march to allow the artillery to fire, and we have it on the best of unofficial authority that the artillery failed at critical moments. Howe seems to have had no knowledge of the physical features of the Charlestown peninsula. Some of the guns became mired in a swamp, as is clearly shown on De Berniere's map. Worse than that, it is alleged that the 6-pounder companies found 12-pound ball in their side boxes. It is further alleged, though the fact is of minor importance, that this cruel blunder was due to the carelessness of Colonel Cleaveland, Chief of Artillery, who was wasting time in company with a daughter of Master

* Charles Stuart, in his memorandum, cited in previous notes, has this to say, "the line from marching from an [exterior?] point without the disposition being alter'd caused the Corps naturally to crowd upon one another and made a confusion in which we suffer'd as much from our own fire as the enemy's." The sentence, sufficiently ambiguous in itself, is further complicated by the undecipherable word. That some such catastrophe occurred in a manner and at a time and place unknown is not impossible. Burgoyne asserts it in his letter to Rochfort, quoted on a later page.

Lovell of the Latin School. Cleaveland, in defending himself to Lord Amherst,* states that he sent 66 "Rounds to each Gun, not more than half was fired." That seems equivocal, as the question was one not of quantity, but of calibre. He then adds these words: "the men sent on purpose to Carry the Boxes of Ammunition after the Cannon went a Plundering and occasioned it to be said one of the Guns wanted ammunition. A commanding officer of Artillery cannot be in every place." Cleaveland's defence is not convincing and it is almost as easy to believe with the army that in this crisis he was engaged in dalliance with the schoolmaster's daughter, as that a squad of his command were allowed to desert their posts in front of the enemy and to walk unrestrained a good half-mile across the fields to sack a burning village. At all events, his statement confirms the undoubted fact that the Royal Artillery had more than its share of trouble at Bunker Hill.

While Howe was so fruitlessly employed on the right, Pigot had been engaging the attention of the redoubt. With Charlestown well alight, the smoke of the conflagration was drifting over the battlefield before a southwest breeze. After a prolonged musketry duel, the fire from the redoubt ceased, and not only Pigot but the spectators in Boston were deceived into believing that the Provincials were abandoning their works. The British advanced as to an easy victory, but as they came close under the parapet, they were met by a sudden and

* Letter in the British Museum, dated December 3, 1775.

shattering

BUNKER's HILL.

A NEW SONG.

I.

THE ſeventeenth of June, at Break of Day,
The Rebels they ſurpriz'd us,
With their ſtrong Works, which they'd thrown up,
To burn the Town and drive us.
But ſoon there was an Order came,
An Order to defeat them,
Like Rebels ſtout, they ſtood it out,
And thought we ne'er could beat them.

II.

About the Hour of Ten next Day,
An Order came for marching,
With three good Fluts and ſixty Rounds,
Each Man was to diſcharge them.
Then we march'd down to the Long Wharf,
Our Boats were ready waiting,
With Expedition we embark'd,
Our Ships were cannonading.

III.

From Corps-Hill Battery, near Charles Town,
The Twenty-fours they played,
And from three Frigates in the Stream,
Who very well behaved.
The Glaſgow Frigate clear'd the Shore,
All at the Time of landing,
With her Grape Shot and Cannon-Balls,
No Rebels near could ſtand then.

IV.

But when our Boats all filled were
With Officers and Soldiers,
Of as good Troops as England had,
We car'd not who oppos'd us.
But when our Boats all filled were,
Drawn up in Line of Battle,
Like Show'rs of Hail the Shot did fly,
And Cannons loud did rattle.

V.

With five Battalions of us there,
We very well behaved,
And every Man did Honour get,
For Marſhips he received.
But when the Rebels ſcal'd their Walls,
We did put them to Flight,
Some of them roll'd in their own Blood,
Now Bunker's Hill deny't.

VI.

But when we landed on the Shore,
And formed all together,
The Rebels they had mann'd their Works,
And thought we'd ne'er gone thither.
But ſoon we did perceive brave Howe,
Great Howe, our brave Commander,
With Grenadiers and Infantry,
We made them to ſurrender.

VII.

But as for our Artillery,
They all behaved gaily,
And while they Ammunition had,
They gave it to them Plenty.
Their Conductor did get broke,
For Miſconduct, I'm ſure,
The Shot he ſent for twelve-pound Guns,
Was made for twenty-four.

VIII.

Brave Howe was ſo conſiderate,
That to prevent all Dangers,
He allow'd us Half a Pint a Day,
To Rum we're now no Strangers.
Long may he live, by Sea or Land,
For he's belov'd by many;
The Name of Howe the Rebels dread,
I ſee it very plainly.

IX.

Some People in the Town did ſay,
(Poor Rogues their Hearts were quaking)
We went to kill their Countrymen,
As they their Hay were making.
But ſuch damn'd Whigs I never ſaw,
To hang them all I'd rather,
Or mow their Hay with Muſket-Balls
And Back-Shot mix'd together.

X.

But now my Song is near an End,
To compleat my Ditty,
It is the poor and ignorant,
And only them, I pity.
But as for that King Hancock,
And Adams, if they're taken,
Their Heads, for Signs, up high we'll hang,
Upon a Hill call'd Bacon.

shattering fire that sent them reeling back for "nearly one hundred and fifty yards." *

Burgoyne and Clinton, viewing Pigot's discomfiture from Copp's Hill,† were startled and regarded the moment as critical. A reinforcement of two battalions was then landing on the Charlestown beach,‡ and seeing them in apparent indecision which way to march, Clinton threw himself into a boat and was rowed across to become their leader. And yet this black crisis was for the British but the darkness that precedes the dawn. Pigot's shattered battalions were promptly rallied, while the 47th and the First Marines, which up to this time had suffered lightly, were pushed up between Charlestown Village and the redoubt to attack from that side. All along the line, as though by a common impulse, knapsacks, greatcoats, and all useless impedimenta were stripped off and scattered to the winds. The artillery had finally surmounted their difficulties and gained a position where they partly enfiladed the

* See Prescott's statement quoted in what I have to say on the American defence.

† It has always been assumed that the excursion of Clinton and Burgoyne to Copp's Hill was prompted by military curiosity. That Clinton was there with a certain duty to perform is revealed by a note in the Clinton papers at Bay City. In this note, dated June 17, Gage, after informing Clinton that the 47th Regiment and First Marines had been sent "to the North Battery . . . to reinforce General Howe, when ordered," instructs his subordinate as follows: "I am to beg of you to watch General Howe's corps and if you observe the smallest occasion to reinforce him, that you immediately send notice to the above mentioned corps, to procede & join him." Howe's request for his reserves before launching his attack relieved Clinton of the necessity of exercising his discretion.

‡ The 63rd Battalion and the Second Marines who arrived too late to enter the action.

lightly

lightly fortified line between the breastwork and the fence and rendered it untenable. With bayonets fixed and without firing, the British streamed forward at the charge. The breastwork was carried with a rush, its gallant defenders fleeing in all directions, some into the redoubt. The redoubt and fence were thus suddenly converted into two isolated posts with flanks exposed. The British advanced rapidly into the undefended territory that lay between, and it is said poured a withering cross-fire upon Prescott's men as they rushed out of the sally port. So Howe, who had planned to gain the battle on his right, finally broke through on his left.

The defenders of the rail fence, who were still confronted by certain Grenadier companies and the remnants of the Light Infantry, held their lines until Prescott's fugitives came abreast and then retired, preserving some measure of order and maintaining a fire that was effective in covering the retreat.* There was no vigorous pursuit, although Clinton's unexpected appearance on the field was an inspiring event, and it is certain that he urged pushing on to Cambridge.† Now this is what the Provincial leaders dreaded, their army being scattered and demoralized and Cambridge, to quote Artemas Ward, "being entirely undefended." While Howe's force was, of course, shattered and ex-

* "The retreat was no flight: it was even covered with bravery and military skill." (Burgoyne to Lord Rochfort, in de Fonblanque's *Burgoyne*, p. 147.) Curiously enough, most American narratives are in disagreement with Burgoyne and suggest a rout.

† Charles Stuart's memorandum. Clinton's activities are fully discussed on a later page.

hausted,

hausted, it is probable that the Marines and the 47th Battalion were available for pursuit, and the 63rd and the Second Marines, fresh and unscathed, were then arriving. But the hour was late, Howe had had fighting enough, and the opportunity, if opportunity it was, was allowed to pass.

The British followed their enemy in leisurely fashion, and it was nearly six o'clock before they occupied the Neck. Five of the six Provincial cannon remained in their hands and all of the entrenching equipment. The only joy that night was in the British lines, and the cheering of the troops as they entered the redoubt was plainly heard in Boston.* But their enthusiasm was short-lived and did not survive the realization of what that day's conquest had cost. Then in the British comment and correspondence the anger and discontent in the garrison were plainly evidenced. Here is a savage example: "We are all wrong at the head. My mind cannot help dwelling upon our cursed mistakes. Such ill conduct at the first out-set argues a gross ignorance of the most common rules of the profession, and gives us, for the future, anxious forebodings. I have lost some of those I most valued. This madness or ignorance nothing can excuse. The brave men's lives were wantonly thrown away. Our conductor as much murdered them as if he had cut their throats himself, on Boston Common. Had he fallen, ought we to have regretted him?" †

* Letter of Samuel Paine, *Historical Magazine*, pp. 440–42.

† Letter in *Detail and Conduct of the American War.*

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We must remember that the events we have been reviewing covered a front of no more than half a mile, and that from the first musketry fire to the capture of the redoubt there was consumed probably not more than an hour of time.* Yet on that front and in those short sixty minutes the British casualties amounted to 1054 officers and men.† There is no evidence that any other troops save the Grenadiers and Light Infantry were employed in the attacks upon the rail fence, and the loss in these corps amounted to 465‡ men out of an estimated strength of 700, or nearly seventy per cent. In the four battalions that crossed with Howe, aggregating little more than 800 men, the loss, deducting that of their flank companies, was about 246, or nearly thirty per cent, making the total casualties in the first detachment 711 out of 1500 rank and file engaged. The reserve, which apparently did not enter the action until the final attack upon the redoubt, lost only 166 out of a strength of about 700 men. It appears that the bulk of their casualties fell upon the Grenadiers and Light Infantry, only about 50 being sustained by the battalion companies of the 47th and the First Marines. My figures take no account of the non-commissioned officers and musicians included in the British official total,

* The evidence on the duration of the battle is given in my comments on the American defence.

† Gage's report, 226 killed, 828 wounded.

‡ We know the losses inflicted upon twelve of the twenty-two flank companies and I have computed the casualties of the remaining ten by the average of the twelve. Battalion losses are determined by deducting the casualties in the flank companies from regimental lists.

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nor of the 92 commissioned officers who suffered, out of perhaps 250 on the field.*

In the British correspondence we find general admiration expressed for the heroism of the troops and much praise of the courage of their adversaries, commendation of "the Troops of *Putnam*, who fought so gallantly *pro aris et focis*" † — sentiments that Lord North might have regarded as unbecoming, perhaps treasonable, in a British officer. But what shall we say to this letter, penned by no less a person than General John Burgoyne and addressed to Lord Rochfort, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Its contents are to be confidential with the recipient and "not pass even in a whisper . . . to more than *one* person." No wonder that the General trembles as he writes.

"The zeal and intrepidity of the officers, which was without exception exemplary, was ill seconded by the private men. Discipline, not to say courage, was wanting. In the critical moment of carrying the redoubt, the officers of some corps were almost alone; and what was the worst part of the confusion of these corps — all the wounds of the officers were not received from the enemy. I do not mean to convey any suspicion of back-

* Of course many of the injuries were slight. This is true in the case of several officers while General Cleaveland reports under date of July 22, that of the thirteen wounded in the artillery only one had died, the others having "mostly recovered." On the other hand, there is in the Haldimand Papers in the British Museum an undated document signed "John Shancks" giving a list of the casualties at Bunker Hill and stating that 250 soldiers succumbed to their wounds.

† Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1092–93.

wardness

wardness in the cause of Government among the soldiery, which ignorant people in England are apt to imagine; and as little would I be understood to imply any dislike or ill will to their officers. . . . I only mean to represent that the men . . . being ill grounded in the great points of discipline . . . it will require some training under such generals as Howe and Clinton before they can prudently be entrusted in many exploits against such odds as the conduct and spirit of the leaders enabled them in this instance to overcome."*

Burgoyne's tribute to the officers was richly deserved; but did he stoop to the vilification of the common soldier in order to convince the King that he had one major-general in America who was shocked at deficiencies there and was quite competent to set them right? He was a wise and humane soldier, but a jealous subor-

* De Fonblanque, *Life and Correspondence of General John Burgoyne*, pp. 147–48. It is only fair to say that Burgoyne's accusation is sustained by Lord Rawdon in a letter in the Hastings collection, addressed to the Earl of Huntington and dated August 3, 1775. In a previous letter, dated June 20th, Rawdon is enthusiastic in his praise of the troops, but in August his sentiment has changed. He writes gloomily, "our confidence in our troops is much lessened since the 17th of June. Some of them did, indeed behave with infinite courage, but others behaved as remarkably ill. We have great want of discipline both amongst officers and men." In the Harvard College Library is another letter of Rawdon's, written to a brother officer and dated September 6th. In this he seems to return to his first enthusiasm. I do not attempt to reconcile the inconsistencies in these letters, but it seems probable that at some time between June 20th and August 3rd Rawdon heard, perhaps from Burgoyne, of some misbehavior that had not come under his observation in the battle and had not been alleged on the earlier date. Burgoyne's statement that "all the wounds of the officers were not received from the enemy" is confirmed in Charles Stuart's memorandum. Stuart, however, who did not share Rawdon's admiration for Howe, implies that the responsibility did not rest with the troops, but upon faulty tactics that "naturally" resulted in confusion.

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dinate, hungry for power. As he sat in his quarters writing his confidential note to that noble lord in England, nearly nine hundred of the men he was defaming were lying in new-made graves or suffering pain from wounds received in battle. That these men recoiled and broke under the terrible fire, which so far exceeded that of Minden, is an undoubted fact; that the officers had to exert almost superhuman efforts to prevent panic and disorder has never been denied. But if "discipline, not to say courage," were lacking in that fire-smitten rank and file, it would be interesting to know what quality or influence it was that enabled them to endure undefeated the terrors of such an appalling test.

Only eight months later, February 20, 1776, Burgoyne was sitting once more in his seat in Parliament. To Colonel Barré's charge that because of detestation of the American service the common soldiers had "grossly misbehaved at Bunker Hill," he sprang to his feet and returned an angry denial. "No men on earth," he declared, "ever behaved with more spirit and perseverance, till they forced the enemy out of their entrenchments." * So we can appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober.

I think we have determined from indisputable official authority the military units serving in the Boston garrison in June, 1775. From equally reliable sources it has been possible to make a close approximation of the numerical strength of those units and the size of

* *London Chronicle*, February 24, 1776, p. 186.

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the force employed by Howe in his attack. While we do not know and never shall know the truth in regard to the Provincial strength in the battle, one thing is certain; Howe so managed his affairs as to be drawn at last into an assault upon the front of entrenched lines stoutly defended by a superior force.

Having in mind the obtuseness of the British High Command, the misfortunes and tactical mistakes of the commander in the field, and, above all, the amazing courage and steadiness of those rustic defenders of the redoubt and the rail fence, I conceive that the conquest of Breed's Hill by the King's troops was a very gallant feat of arms. It was the repetition of such deeds in another century, that wrung from the French Marshal* the admission that the British infantry was the best in the world, and drew from him also that supplementary grateful prayer thanking God that there was so little of it.

* Attributed to Marshal Soult.

II
THE AMERICAN DEFENCE

II

THE AMERICAN DEFENCE

I HAVE said that General Gage's command in Boston was regarded as a good army. Judged by the same military standards, the Grand American Army, as it was somewhat grandiloquently styled at Cambridge, was no army at all. John Adams's characterization of this force, written in 1818, was clear and informing:

"The Army at Cambridge was not a National Army, for there was no Nation: It was not a United States Army, for there was no united States. It was not an Army of united Colonies; for it could not be said in any sense that the Colonies were united, the Center of their union, the Congress at Philadelphia had not adopted them, nor acknowledged the Army at Cambridge. It was not a New England Army, for New England had not associated. New England had no legal Legislature nor any common executive Authority even upon the principle of original Authority, or even of original power in the people. Massachusetts had her Army, Connecticutt her Army, New Hampshire her Army, and Rhode Island her Army. These four Armies met at Cambridge, and imprisoned the British Army in Boston. But who was the Sovereign of this united or rather congregated Army and who its commander in Chief?

Chief? It had none. Putnam, Poor, and Green were as independent of Ward as Ward was of them. None of them but Ward was Subject to the orders of the Massachusetts provincial Congress. I desire to know from whom Putnam received his Commission, and from whom Poor received his Commission?"*

These legal anomalies were responsible in part for conditions described by Mr. Frothingham as follows: "The orderly books of this period attest the difficulty of reducing the men to the habits of the soldier's life. Offenders were frequent. Intoxication, peculation, false returns, disobedience of orders, disrespect to officers, want of soldier-like conduct, were the most common offences."† It was probably not until Washington's arrival, when, to use his own words, he found "a mixed multitude of people here, under very little discipline, order, or government," that the punishments cited by Frothingham went into effect, that is, "pecuniary fines, standing in the pillory, riding the wooden horse, drumming out of camp, whipping at the head of the regiment, or in still more public places."

The nominal control of the Massachusetts forces was vested in the Provincial Congress, the Committee of Safety in session at Cambridge holding executive authority from it. The Council of War was composed of the generals from the different colonies and appears to have acted in an advisory capacity. The two months

* John Adams to George Brinley, June 19, 1818, from the original letter in the Massachusetts Historical Society.

† *Siege*, p. 217, note 2.

succeeding

succeeding the 19th of April was certainly a critical period in the American camp. More than once there were grave doubts as to whether Massachusetts would be able to hold her men together.* The laws long operative in the land had been brought into disrepute. The Courts had been overthrown and too many of the army, accustomed to and encouraged in the defiance of governmental authority, began to display the same disposition toward edicts of the Provincial Congress that they had toward those formulated by a British parliament. The towns which so gladly refrained from placing their tax money in the hands of the legal Receiver General showed an equal disinclination to acknowledge the authority of his successor named by the Provincial Congress.† The camps became the hotbed of radical debate, the civil power was openly condemned and threatened. "We tremble," said the Provincial Congress on May 16, in a letter to the Continental Congress, "at having an army, although consisting of our own countrymen, established here without a civil power to provide for and control it."‡ The alarming nature of the situation is nowhere better set forth than in the letter of Joseph Warren dated May 26 to Samuel Adams, then in Philadelphia:

* Warren in writing to Gerry (letter in my possession) pays high tribute to John Pigeon for preventing such a catastrophe. Pigeon acted as commissary general and appears to have been an energetic and resourceful man, one of the unsung heroes of the time.

† Clearly evidenced in the *Proceedings* of the Provincial Congress. Dawson discusses the matter in the *Historical Magazine*, p. 329.

‡ *Journals*, Massachusetts Provincial Congress, p. 230.

"I see

"I see more & more the Necessity of establishing a civil Government here and such a Government as shall be sufficient to control the military Forces, not only of this Colony, but also Such as Shall be sent to us from the other Colonies. The Continent must Strengthen & support with all its Weight the civil Authority here, otherwise our Soldiery will lose the Ideas of right & wrong, and will plunder instead of protecting, the Inhabitants. This is but too evident already; & I assure you *inter nos*, that unless some Authority Sufficient to restrain the Irregularities of this Army, is established, we Shall very soon find ourselves involved in greater Difficulties than you can well imagine. . . . My good Wish therefore is that we may restrain everything which tends to weaken the Principles of Right & Wrong, more especially with regard to *property*. . . . I hope Care will be taken by the Continental Congress to apply an immediate Remedy, as the Infection is caught by every new Core [corps] that arrives. . . . For the Honor of my Country, I wish the Disease may be cured before it is known to exist." *

Elbridge Gerry's letter of June 4, addressed to the Massachusetts delegates in the Continental Congress, is in the same strain:

"The people are fully possessed of their dignity from the frequent delineation of their rights, which have been published to defeat the ministerial party in

* The original of this letter is in the Samuel Adams Papers in the New York Historical Society. It is printed in Frothingham's *Life of Joseph Warren*, pp. 495–96.

their

their attempt to impress them with high notions of government. They now feel rather too much their own importance, and it requires great skill to produce such subordination as is necessary. This takes place principally in the army; they have affected to hold the military too high, but the civil must be first supported, and unless an established form of government is provided, it will be productive of injury. Every day's delay makes the task more arduous."*

Clearly the Revolution in Massachusetts had reached a stage where its champions believed that Continental support was necessary to avert anarchy. Among the wiser heads the army was coming to be regarded as a greater menace to civil authority and property rights than it was to the royal garrison in Boston.

Yet there is plenty of optimism in the correspondence and gossip of the day. "Fine fellows you know our countrymen are," writes James Warren to Samuel Adams, "and want nothing but a general of spirit and abilities to make them a fine army."† William Tudor rejoices that "luckily for us the unevenness of the Country favours our irregular mode of Attack & Defence."‡ To Putnam is attributed the remark that the Americans, while anxious about their legs, had no fear as to their heads. If covered to their shoulders, they would fight forever. In this strange camp good men

* J. T. Austin, *Life of Elbridge Gerry*, I, 78–79.

† June 21, 1775, in 1 *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, XIV, 81.

‡ June 23, 1775, in *Historical Magazine*, p. 377.

winced

winced at the profanity that greeted their ears,* yet the soldiers listened reverently and in large numbers to militant sermons and sang their hymns with vociferous fervor. There were scores of incompetent officers who cringed before their turbulent commands, and there were also many forceful spirits who had been shot over in the French Wars and who commanded respect and some measure of obedience within their sphere of influence. Some of them were half-pay officers in the King's service who referred to certain men in the British garrison of Boston as friends and old comrades in arms.

As to the size of the army, the constantly shifting personnel of the regiments, due to the activities of recruits and deserters, makes it difficult of determination. The returns of different dates have always been regarded with suspicion by historians. There exists General Ward's estimate of June 9, naming sixteen Massachusetts regiments in and about Cambridge, with a strength of about six thousand rank and file.† These,

* "As to the moral state of the Camp it is bad; I see no kind of seriousness; but on the contrary my ears are filled with the most shocking oaths and imprecations; and the tremendous name of the great God is taken on the most trifling occasions." (James Cogswell to Levi Hart, June 15, 1775. Original in the Boston Public Library. See *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, 59, 115.)

"My heart trembles on account of the Sin, vanity and almost every vice, which are rampant thro' the camp. Jehovah's Name is daily, hourly and almost continually profaned by most all characters among us. . . . If ever an army needed the prayers of good men, this does." (Chaplain David Avery to Eleazar Wheelock, President of Dartmouth College, February 13, 1776. Original in possession of the author.)

† Printed in Frothingham's *Siege*, p. 118, note.

with

with Putnam's Connecticut regiment and a few companies of Spencer's, formed the centre of the Provincial lines. The right rested on the high land in Roxbury and included, besides the four thousand Massachusetts men under Thomas, the greater part of Spencer's Connecticut regiment and the Rhode Island "Army of Observation" under Nathanael Greene at Jamaica Plain. The two New Hampshire regiments of Stark and Reed formed the left wing, Stark's being stationed at Medford, Reed's at Charlestown Neck. Perhaps the entire force investing Boston in June may be roughly estimated at fifteen thousand rank and file. The men were armed with guns of all sizes and calibres, sometimes owned, sometimes borrowed, sometimes, perhaps, the spoil of Tory houses. There was no magazine or arsenal. Powder and ball were in insufficient supply, and even nails and old scraps of iron were treasured as death-dealing missiles in case the supply of lead ran low.* Testimony as to the number of field guns is conflicting, but this is unimportant, as there were at this time no gunners competent to handle them to advantage.

These facts are all clearly demonstrated in the annals of the time, and yet it was this so-called army, characterized by William Tudor as "little better than

* See a letter of Dr. Grant, a British surgeon, dated Boston, June 23, 1775, in the New York Historical Society: "The Provincials had either exhausted their ball, or they were determined that every wound should prove fatal; their muskets were charged with old nails and angular pieces of iron." (*Historical Magazine*, p. 361.)

an

an armed mob," that was to challenge to combat the British army in Boston.

The evidence upon which our Bunker Hill story is based consists, first, of that of a contemporaneous character; second, of that developed by the Putnam-Prescott controversy which had its origin in General Dearborn's outbreak in 1818; and third, of the affidavits furnished by the alleged surviving participants of the battle who attended the semi-centennial exercises in 1825.* I assume that no one denies that contemporaneous evidence is the most hopeful source for the establishment of any historical fact and promises the most substantial reward to the conscientious investigator. Unfortunately, the testimony of that sort concerning Bunker Hill is meagre and unsatisfactory. Official information is almost wholly lacking. We have

* There is also the testimony emanating from the Prescott family, embodied first in what is known as "the manuscript," and second in the memoir written by Judge Prescott, the Colonel's son. Neither is to be regarded as in any sense contemporaneous authority, both being probably of even later date than the affidavits of 1825. The manuscript, said to have been written by different members of the family, is brief and commonplace and nowhere suggests collaboration. The memoir is free from the bitterness that characterized the output of so many partisans in the Putnam-Prescott controversy and is evidently inspired by the loving pride of a son in the achievements of a worthy sire. It is open to the criticism that attaches to any recollections of the kind. The name and high respectability of the aged writer have won for it the confidence of many historians and it has had a marked influence in shaping the commonly accepted story of the battle. It is of no importance to us in our effort to get back to original sources and should, I think, be rejected by every one, in so far as it conflicts with what Colonel Prescott said himself in 1775. The manuscript is printed in C. Butler's *History of Groton* (1848), pp. 337–41, and in the *Historical Magazine*, pp. 437–38; and the memoir will be found in full in 1 *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, xiv, 68–78.

the

the report of the Committee of Safety, written by the Reverend Peter Thacher, who, whatever his patriotic enthusiasm, lacked, as we shall see, many qualities desirable in a military historian. The orderly book of the Commander-in-Chief at Cambridge contains only a marginal note stating that the battle was fought on June 17 and giving the number of casualties. No one can say how long after the battle this entry was made. Such other orderly books as are at present known furnish little of importance. The lack of organization in the army was clearly reflected in its book-keeping. There has always been debate whether Ward's orders given to Prescott were in writing or were only of an oral character. We have little to guide us as to Ward's intentions or activities before or during the battle.

Contemporaneous statements by participants in the action are scarce. There is Prescott's letter to John Adams,* Stark's laconic communication to the New Hampshire authorities,† and a few useful diaries and letters. Then there are the newspapers, and letters of noncombatants, giving the gossip of the action and the feeling in the camp. They form an important, if contradictory, body of testimony.

The evidence of 1818 is not only perplexing but of distinctly dubious value.‡ For the most part it embod-

* In Frothingham's *Siege*, pp. 395–96.

† *Collections*, New Hampshire Historical Society, II, 144–45; reprinted in abridged form in the *Historical Magazine*, pp. 370–71.

‡ Dearborn's account and much of the controversial matter it inspired is reprinted by Dawson in the *Historical Magazine*, pp. 402–37.

ies

ies the hazy memories and very present animosities of men of character and even distinction. Dearborn's account, with his attack upon Putnam's courage and behavior, abounds in absurd misstatements and amazing flights of imagination. He marshalled good men and true to utter words in his support, and General Putnam's son also rallied a reputable host to oppose their muddy recollections to the vagaries of Dearborn's friends.

The devotee of any theory on Bunker Hill can find authority among these embittered witnesses, and evidence to overthrow any theory can likewise be had in plentiful supply. Dearborn had so little conception of the infirmities that characterize old age, that he republished the contemporaneous map of Lieutenant de Berniere with some astounding "corrections." This brought down upon his head the criticism of so good a man as Governor Brooks of Massachusetts, whose own memory was in a state that a physician would probably have pronounced normal for his years. Mr. Winsor advised the "avoidance of the mingled recollections and self-deceptions of the survivors of all grades, who in 1818 furnished so many depositions, over forty years after the conflict, to perplex the truth-lover. These confused recollections, added to the local jealousies of the partisans of the troops of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut, and to the facts narrated by different persons as having taken place in positions so disconnected as the redoubt and the

the rail fence, have done much to render the sifting of evidence very necessary." *

Mr. Frothingham had the courage and the patience to attempt such sifting when he was writing his *History of the Siege*. No one in his time could have done it better, but the result was not satisfactory to him and can hardly be satisfactory to the reader who desires "nothing but the truth." Writing seventy-five years after the battle, Mr. Frothingham explains apologetically that he feels "incapable of intentionally disparaging the services of any of the patriot band who bore part in this great work." Perhaps to-day, one hundred and fifty years after the event, a writer is justified in approaching the task with a desire neither to disparage nor to exalt the services of any one, whatever his views or activities in the controversies of the time.

The third body of evidence, that of 1825, can be dismissed in a few words. Mr. William Sullivan and other directors of the Bunker Hill Monument Association improved the opportunity of the semi-centennial celebration to obtain the depositions of some forty "survivors" of the battle, who graced the occasion by their presence. A transcript of this evidence in three volumes was in 1842 submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Society by Richard Sullivan. It was referred for inspection to a committee made up of Messrs. George Ticknor, George Bancroft, and George E. Ellis. In April,

* Justin Winsor. *Reader's Handbook of the American Revolution* (1880), pp. 43–44.

1842,

1842, Dr. Ellis reported to the Society as follows: "Their contents were most extraordinary; many of the testimonies extravagant, boastful, inconsistent and utterly untrue; mixtures of old men's broken memories and fond imaginings with the love of the marvellous. Some of those who gave in affidavits about the battle could not have been in it, nor even in its neighborhood. They had got so used to telling the story for the wonderment of village listeners as grandfathers' tales, and as petted representatives of 'the spirit of '76,' that they did not distinguish between what they had seen and done and what they had read, heard, or dreamed. The decision of the committee was that much of the contents of the volumes was wholly worthless for history, and some of it discreditable, as misleading and false." *

The Committee concluded that these fulminations of the aged men whom Daniel Webster so glowingly apostrophized on Bunker Hill in 1825 should be disregarded as history, sealed up, and deposited in the Cabinet of the Society as curios. They are supposed to have been returned later to the Sullivan family and by them consigned to the flames.

In the seventeen years intervening between the taking of the Bunker Hill affidavits and their submission to the Historical Society, they were of course regarded as a legitimate part of the battle story. Mr. Samuel Swett, a voluminous writer on our subject during the

* 1 *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, II, 231, note. Cf. II, 224, 225.

first

first half of the nineteenth century, was instrumental in their circulation and publication; but the action of the Historical Society and the caution of later historians have prevented any serious spread of the annoying infection.

Having emphasized those characteristics of the army which were most in the minds of the men who were responsible for its well-being and control, and having classified the evidence upon which our story of the battle is founded, we find ourselves on the threshold of our subject. I do not propose to retell the story of Bunker Hill in consecutive narrative fashion, but rather to comment upon certain phases of the affair with the aid of such contemporaneous evidence as exists. Let us for the moment close our ears to the angry clamor of 1818 with a view to refreshing our memories as to what was said and thought in the more fateful year of 1775.

The Committee of Safety was well served by spies and we know that General Gage's designs upon Dorchester Neck were promptly reported in Cambridge. The Council of War was composed of men of courage, with little or no experience in the field of generalship. They were doubtless aware that the high lands of Dorchester and Charlestown were necessary to the security of the British. They must also have known that for purposes of defence against any sortie by the garrison, these positions were in no sense important to the besiegers. So when on May 12 the Committee of Safety and the Council

Council of War considered the seizure and fortification of Bunker Hill they were contemplating aggressive action to secure that which was unimportant to themselves but vital to the interests of their enemy. Nothing came of these deliberations, both bodies shrinking at that time from so bold and provocative a measure. The matter came up again on June 15, the day on which Gage's plans for the 18th had become known in Cambridge. The Committee of Safety "resolved unanimously" that not only Bunker Hill, but "some one hill or hills on Dorchester Neck be likewise secured." This resolve was not entered in the records of the Committee of Safety until the 19th, perhaps from neglect, perhaps to ensure secrecy. Representatives of the Committee and the Council doubtless conferred with the generals commanding the right wing sometime during the 16th of June. While no record exists of what occurred in that quarter, we must assume that General Thomas was not favorable to the suggestion. Any move upon Dorchester Neck would have devolved upon him, and it is certain that no move or feint to suggest such a move was attempted by him. Putnam has been represented as the moving spirit in the Council in favor of aggression, Joseph Warren as being in opposition.* If this is so, the gathering of Prescott's detachment in the field alongside Ward's Headquarters in the gathering darkness of that June evening to listen to the prayer of

* The theory rests largely upon statements made by Daniel Putnam, the General's son.

President Langdon of Harvard, was evidence of the fact that Putnam had carried his point.

Joseph Warren lay that night at Watertown. Was he fearful that the expedition was rash and ill-considered, that the detachment was being sent to death or captivity, that the God of battles was frowning upon a good cause? Perhaps on this, the last night of his life, he was supported by the hope that the God of battles, who had suffered this thing to happen, might yet relent to confound His enemies and to bring His servants through without dishonor. Next day Warren was in the field, musket in hand, the ranking officer on the ground, but declining all command, insistent on serving as the pupil of more experienced men. He makes but a dim and modest figure on the battle canvas, hardly distinguishable in the throng that lines the front. He fell unobserved in the moment of defeat, and it was by British hands that he was interred in his mother soil. Is it possible that his rejection of the pleading of his friends and his rash and needless presence with the army were to convince his colleagues that his prudent counsel had not been dictated by fear? It was the post of danger, not of authority, that he sought and found upon the field.

I have quoted Mr. Winsor's comment on the confusion arising from evidence as to facts taking place "in positions so disconnected as the redoubt and the rail fence." I propose to avoid certain pitfalls by treating affairs at these points as two separate actions, which in some

some sense they certainly were.* The rail fence was a late and uncommanded interpolation, and lends itself naturally to separate consideration.

And now let us make our way to Cambridge and fall in with the rear of that dusky column which is moving slowly across the green into the Charlestown road. The prayer has been said, ammunition and provisions† have been distributed, the customary allowance of rum has been served, and the lanterns twinkle feebly in the van. There are three men in the column to whom I think we may attach ourselves with profit. Colonel Prescott you know, and I would introduce you to two private soldiers, Thomas Boynton, of Andover, and Peter Brown, of Prescott's regiment. These men are recommended because they happen to be the only ones of my acquaintance who told, more than one hundred and fifty years ago, what they did and what they saw at the defence of the redoubt in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Prescott's information is imparted in the letter he wrote to John Adams on August 25, 1775:

* Howe himself in his report refers to the operations gainst the redoubt and against the fence as two distinct enterprises. "Upon the success of either of these attacks the defeat of the rebels depended."

† Orders were issued that the men should be supplied with one day's provisions, but as they found themselves short of food and drink in the morning, this may have been one of the important matters that was overlooked. Mr. Charles Martyn, in his *Life of Artemas Ward* (1921, p. 123), puts proper emphasis on the entry in Stow's Orderly Book for June 17, which proves that the regiments of Nixon, Little, and Mansfield with 200 Connecticut troops were to relieve Prescott on the afternoon of that day. Prescott probably did not expect earlier relief. Stow's entry throws discredit upon statements in the Prescott manuscript and other late authorities.

"On

View of the Town of BOSTON from Breeds Hill in CHARLESTOWN.

"On the 16 June, in the evening, I received orders to march to Breed's Hill in Charlestown, with a party of about one thousand men, consisting of three hundred of my own regiment, Colonel Bridge and Lieut. [Colonel] Brickett, with a detachment of theirs, and two hundred Connecticut forces commanded by Captain Knowlton. We arrived at the spot, the lines were drawn by the engineer, and we began the intrenchment about twelve o'clock."

This brief, business-like statement, plunges us at once into the realm of controversy. The debate hinges upon Prescott's use of the name *Breed's Hill*, and on his failure to mention an episode that most of our historians assert as having occurred. Samuel Gray, writing to John Dyer in London under date of July 12, 1775, mentions as hearsay "that the engineer* and two generals went on to the hill at night and reconnoitred the ground; that one general and the engineer were of opinion we ought not to intrench on Charlestown Hill [Breed's] till we had thrown up some works on the north and south ends of Bunker Hill, to cover our men in their retreat, if that should happen, but on the pressing importunity of the other general officer, it was consented to begin and was done." †

Gray is careful to give his information as hearsay and not of his own knowledge, but it receives a measure of confirmation from the report of the Committee of Safety dated July 25, which states that "*by some mistake*,

* Richard Gridley.

† Frothingham, *Siege*, p. 394.

this

this hill [Breed's] was marked out for the intrenchment instead of the other."* As Putnam is credited with being the dominating figure in the conference which was responsible for Prescott's march, so he has been named as the general who overbore his colleagues in that night conference on Bunker Hill. There is no satisfactory evidence in support of either theory. Putnam, it would seem, should have been the last man to advocate the Breed's Hill position. All the evidence, ancient and modern, good, bad, and indifferent, indicates that throughout the 17th of June Putnam had Bunker Hill so to speak "on the brain." It is alleged on the best authority that he drew men and entrenching tools from Breed's where they were sorely needed,† and that he diverted men marching into action to the work of entrenching on Bunker Hill. Of course, he was right in regarding Prescott as in great peril unless the more commanding position in his rear was securely held; but if this was his opinion, is it likely that he forced upon unwilling colleagues the fortification of an untenable outpost when there were neither tools nor men enough to fortify and garrison both positions?

* Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1373–76; reprinted in Frothingham's *Siege*, p. 382, and in *Historical Magazine*, p. 387. The italics are mine.

† General Heath's memorandum, probably contemporaneous, is worth quoting: "Just before the action began, Gen. Putnam came to the redoubt, and told Col. Prescott that the entrenching tools must be sent off, or they would be lost; the Colonel replied, that if he sent any of the men away with the tools, not one of them would return; to this the General answered, they shall every man return. A large party was then sent off with the tools, and not one of them returned; in this instance the Colonel was the best judge of human nature." (*Memoirs*, 1901, p. 123.)

It

It has been asserted that Prescott's reference to Breed's Hill was an inadvertence, and it may possibly be so. Dawson argued in 1868 that the Council of War deliberately deceived the Committee of Safety and that Prescott had oral orders from Ward to occupy Breed's Hill. According to that theory the dispute might have been between Putnam and Prescott, the former urging the occupation of Bunker Hill and the latter insisting on carrying out Ward's orders to entrench on the lesser height. There is no authority for this entirely plausible conjecture. Prescott's silence leaves us in perplexity. Indeed, if we disregard the long-range evidence of 1818 we have little but current gossip to support the story of any quarrel or the presence of any officer on the ground that night superior in rank to Prescott.*

We have now cleared the way for the witnesses I have named, and can listen to Prescott as he goes on with his story. The bombardment of his position, he says, began "just before sun-rising," and then he adds curtly, "the engineer forsook me." Worse than that, his field officers (that is, Bridge and Brickett)† failed him,

* Some one in Reed's New Hampshire Regiment might have thrown some light upon the mystery. Reed's regiment, since June 14, had been quartered in the houses on the Medford road near Charlestown Neck, with orders to maintain outposts between the Neck and the ferry and on Bunker Hill. Although they were near neighbors of Prescott throughout the night of the 16th, no one alludes to them nor do they seem to have received orders to advance on the 17th until Stark had passed with the main body of his regiment.

† Prescott was bitter over the loss of the redoubt and probably was oversevere in his references to the commands of Bridge and Brickett. The detachments commanded by these officers comprised 500 men, or one half of Prescott's

him, or, to use his own words, "being indisposed, could render me but little service, and the most of the men under their command deserted the party." About two o'clock, seeing that the British were landing at Moulton's Point, he ordered the train with two field pieces supported by the Connecticut troops "to go and oppose them." It was certainly a feeble force to send against the troops who were already swarming up the little hill that crowned the point, and we are moved to pity as well as to censure by Prescott's next remark. "The train marched a different course, and I believe those sent to their support followed, I suppose to Bunker's Hill." * Then two encouraging facts are noted. The enemy waited an hour at Moulton's Point before marching to the attack, and in that interval Prescott beheld "a party of Hampshire, in conjunction with some other forces," † who had "lined a fence at the distance of

Prescott's force. Their casualties in the battle aggregated 90, or 18 per cent of their strength. If these two regiments left Prescott in the lurch at the redoubt, they certainly did not quit the field, but were clearly in the thick of the fighting. They may have been the "one or two Regiments" mentioned by the Committee of Safety as being in Charlestown Village before it was fired. They must later have been engaged in or near the redoubt. There seems to have been a Provincial force operating between the village and the redoubt throughout the action, and de Berniere shows them firing on the British left flank during the final attack on the redoubt. Page indicates the same thing by showing the Marines with their flank refused.

* Prescott seems to have been as unfair to Knowlton as he was to his Massachusetts colleagues. He had evidently expected the Connecticut men to move in the direction of Moulton's Point, whereas by marching "a different course" they gained a better position and constructed the rail fence. Captain Callender, of the artillery, was court-martialed and dismissed the service, but lived to re-establish his reputation for courage upon many a well-fought field.

† Doubtless Stark's vanguard of 200 men ordered up from Medford by General Ward in the forenoon.

three

three score rods back of the fort, partly to the north." To find himself in touch with reinforcements after suffering so heavily from desertions may well have brought cheer to the Colonel's heart. Scanty as his numbers were, Prescott then commanded his "Lieut.-col. Robinson and Major Woods, each with a detachment, to flank the enemy." Where they went remains a mystery, but at all events he had "reason to think" that they "behaved with prudence and courage."* This left him, he tells us, "with perhaps one hundred and fifty men in the fort." We must assume, I think, that his estimate of the residue of his force was a minimum and that from some quarter he must have been soon after reinforced. Prescott continues: "The enemy advanced and fired very hotly on the fort, and meeting with a warm reception, there was a very smart firing on both sides. After a considerable time, finding our ammunition was almost spent, I commanded a cessation till the enemy advanced within thirty yards, when we gave them such a hot fire that they were obliged to retire nearly one hundred and fifty yards before they could rally and come again to the attack. Our ammunition being nearly exhausted,† could keep up only a scattering fire. The en-

* This detachment may have taken post with the other troops in Charlestown Village. There they would threaten the British flank.

† Prescott is good authority for the shortage of ammunition at the redoubt, where he admits a prolonged musketry duel was maintained. We have little contemporaneous complaint of such a shortage at the rail fence. There the fire seems to have been withheld for close quarters, the shattering of the British attacks consuming but a short period of time and a correspondingly moderate expenditure of powder and ball.

emy

emy being numerous, surrounded our little fort, began to mount our lines and enter the fort with their bayonets. We were obliged to retreat through them, while they kept up as hot a fire as it was possible for them to make."

So much for the observations of the gallant commander in the redoubt. Now let us hear from Private Peter Brown, who speaks for the common soldier and gives us picturesquely his experiences and point of view. A certain letter dated June 25, 1775, and written to his mother, is the medium through which this brave man speaks.* He noted the first glow of dawn reddening the cloudless east, the high-piled town beyond the river emerging wraithlike from the gloom of night, the battery frowning grimly on Copp's Hill, and the men of war swinging lazily at their moorings in the stream below. "We worked there undiscovered till about 5 in the Morn," he says, "and then we saw our Danger being against 8 Ships of the Line & all Boston fortified against us. (The Danger we were in made us think there was Treachery, & that we were brot there to be all slain, and I must & will venture to say that there was Treachery, Oversight or Presumption in the Conduct of our Officers.)"

Peter Brown was evidently a typical Provincial soldier of the better sort. That he was speaking for his comrades as well as for himself is evidenced by an order

* See the letter in Stiles's *Literary Diary*, 1, 595–96; also in Frothingham's *Siege*, pp. 392–93, and in the *Historical Magazine*, pp. 396–97.

passed

passed in Provincial Congress on June 20, naming a committee of five "to inquire into the grounds of a report which has prevailed in the army, that there has been treachery in some of the officers." The story came to the ears of Ezekiel Price, for we read in his diary, "all the reports of treachery were entirely without foundation, and propagated by the enemies to the cause, and weak, discontented men, and by some cowards who fled from the engagement, and formed these lies to favor their escape from danger." *

So far as Peter Brown was concerned, these strictures were undeserved. He was no coward, no thought of flight entered his mind, and he kept at work despite his suspicions of his superiors. He continues: "About half after 5 in the Morn, we not having above half the Fort done, they began to fire, . . . They killed one of us, and then they ceased till about 11 o'Clock and then they began pretty brisk again; and that caused some of our young Country ppl. to desert, apprehending the Danger in a clearer manner than the rest, who were more diligent in digging & fortify^{g} ourselves against them. We began to be almost beat out, being tired by our Labour and having no sleep the night before, but little victuals, no Drink but Rum." †

Brown

* 2 *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, VII, 191.

† This cannot be construed as the wail of a teetotaler. The men were up and down from Charlestown Village all the morning and had free access to the town wells. What Brown yearned for was a long drink of the wine of the country — that is, cider and beer. A letter written to Jeremiah Powell from Newburyport June 21, 1775, says that the men "were almost suffocated

Brown then comments on the waxing and waning of the bombardment, and notes the fire "from the Ship that lay in the River against the Neck to stop our Reinforcem^{ts} w^{c} they did in some Measure."* After repeated applications for artillery, four field pieces arrived from Cambridge, "the Cap^{t} of which," says Brown, "fired but a few times, and then swang his Hat round three Times to the Enemy then ceased to Fire." Soon the barges came into view, making their way across the river crowded with regulars. Brown guesses their number to be about 3000 and adds that there were "about 700 of us left not deserted,† besides 500 Reinforcem^{t} that could not get so nigh to us as to do any good hardly till they saw that we must all be cut off, or some of them, and then they advanced."‡ When the Regulars began to land we are told that the officers in the redoubt "ordered the Artill^{y} to go out of the fort & prevent their Land^{g} if possible, from which the Artill^{y} Cap^{t} took his Pieces & went right off home to Cambridge fast as he could, for which he is now confined & we expect will

cated with dust & choak'd for want of liquor." Jonathan Trumbull writes August 31, 1779, that the men were "not even furnished with provisions and liquors for their refreshment." (1 *Massachusetts Historical Collections*, VI, 159.)

* The armed transport Symmetry, mounting eighteen 9-pounders, bombarded the Neck from Charles River.

† Dawson made a curious misreading of this passage, interpreting it to mean that 700 men left the works, the words "not deserted" being added by way of satire. Brown was not satirical and meant that there were 700 left in the redoubt after all desertions.

‡ Referring perhaps to the appearance of Stark's vanguard of 200 men or to some unidentified Massachusetts troops who reached the redoubt.

be

be shot for it.* But the Enemy landed & fronted before us & formed themselves in an Oblong Square, so as to surround us w^c they did in part, & After they were well formed they advanced towds us in Order to swallow us up, but they found a choaky Mouthful of us, tho' we could do noth^g with our small Arms as yet for Distance, & had *but two Cannon & nary Gunner*. And they from B^o & from the ships a fir^g & throw^g Bombs keep^g us down till they got almost round us. But God in Mercy to us fought our Battle for us, & altho' we were but few & so were suffered to be defeated by them, we were preserved in a most wonderful Manner far beyond Expectation, to Admiration."

Peter Brown had endured all manner of hardness as became a good soldier, but he did not propose to throw his life away and was not among those who, we are told, lingered to throw stones and oppose clubbed muskets to the bayonets of the troops. When resistance had become folly, he for the first time thought of himself. Here is his picturesque conclusion: "I was in the fort till the Regulars came in & I jumped over the Walls & ran for about half a Mile where Balls flew like Hailstones, & Cannons roared like Thunder."

Thomas Boynton's statement is valuable, if rather commonplace.† He cites again the events of the night and morning, then adds: "At the sun's rising they be-

* Captain John Callender.

† See his diary in 2 *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, xv, 255.

gan

gan to fire upon us from the shiping; the 3^{d} or 4th shot they kild one man, and many others escaped very narrowly. . . . About 2 or 3 o'clock, the enemy landed, and advanced toards us, its thot to the number of 2000 men, and soon planted their cannon and began the fire, and advancing up to our fort. After they came within gun shot we fird, and then ensud a very hot engagement. After a number of shots passed, the enemy retreated, and we ceased our fire for a few minutes. They advanced again, and we began a hot fire for a short time. The enemy scaling our walls and the number of our men being few, we was ordered to retreat, at which time the enemy were all most round us, and a continual firing at our heals."

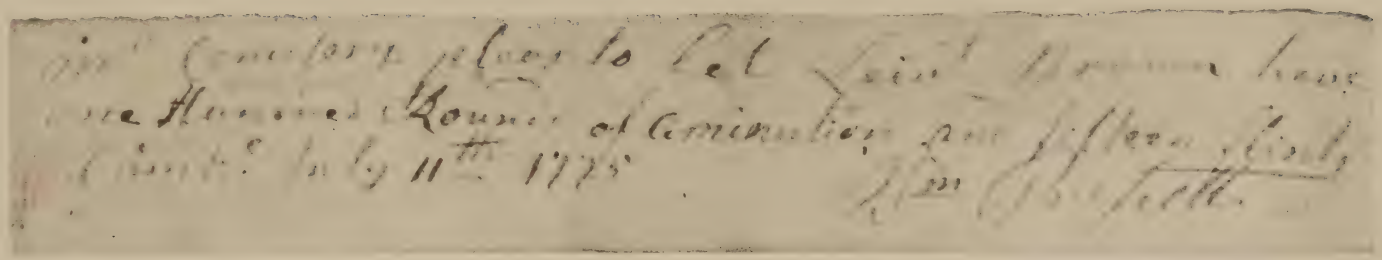
Now what do we learn from these three combatants and eye-witnesses, including the commander at the redoubt? Brown differs with Prescott in his estimate of the force left in the redoubt and neither of the privates mentions the shortage of ammunition which Prescott stresses. On other points the three are in close agreement. The privates coincide on minor details such as the killing of the first man by the cannonade. Brown confirms Prescott as to the desertions, and the misbehaviour of the artillery; Boynton confirms Prescott's brief narrative of the course of the action. The musketry began at long range and continued until Prescott gave the order to cease firing. The advancing troops are met almost under the walls of the redoubt by a close and deadly discharge that sends them reeling back

Military Documents Written and Signed by John Stark and William Prescott

Cambridge April 6th 1775

Rec'd allowance for twenty two men belonging to Capt Ptterbs Regt

John Stark Coll



back one hundred and fifty yards. Then after a few moments' cessation of fire the British half encircle the redoubt and rush it with the bayonet. This account is in harmony with what we hear from Boston, where to spectators the firing seemed incessant.* It is also in agreement with Burgoyne's narrative.† An account of the battle that is supported by Prescott and Burgoyne and by belligerents and spectators on both sides of the river is at least worthy of presentation.

Thacher's report states that the die was cast when the British artillery gained a position where they raked the breastwork from end to end. Page's map shows that the breastwork was first forced about midway of its length. There can be no doubt that the American defence was first broken in this quarter, but the maps indicate no spot where the guns could have been safely used with the results mentioned by Thacher. Mr. Swett, in recasting de Berniere's map for use in his account of the battle, in 1826, did a curious thing. He shows the cannon firing through the sally port of the redoubt, and places them on the only spot in the

* Reverend Andrew Eliot says: "great part of the time the firing seemed incessant." (*Historical Magazine*, p. 369.) A Merchant in Boston: "the most incessant discharge of guns that ever was heard with mortal ears, continued for three quarters of an hour." (Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1079.) Richard Pope: "It resembled rather a continual sheet of Lightning, and an uninterrupted peal of Thunder, than the explosion of Fire arms." (Manuscript diary in the Huntington Library, photostat in the New York Public Library.) A British officer: "an incessant stream of fire poured from the rebel lines, it seemed a continued sheet of fire for near thirty minutes." (In *Detail and Conduct of the American War*, p. 13.)

† Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1094–95.

field

field where they could have accomplished the feat, wholly unmindful that he was leaving them within a few yards of the rail fence, where the gunners could evidently have been picked off in a moment. There is some evidence indicating that the breastwork was stoutly defended in hand to hand fighting.

So much for the redoubt. You remember that Prescott told us of sending out the Connecticut troops to resist the British landing and that they marched another route, probably to Bunker Hill. Captain Knowlton was in charge of the detachment, and if he disobeyed orders, as Prescott believed, he was certainly ordered back by Putnam. Probably to Knowlton belongs the credit for the construction of the rail fence, although it is also probable that he was assisted by the "party of Hampshire" and by certain other adventurous souls who were inspired by their example. The seizure and defence of this line made possible the Battle of Bunker Hill and probably prevented an almost bloodless victory for Howe. Vital as the position was to the American cause, we have almost nothing from high sources describing its defence. There was no commander there with an oversight over the whole line, no one in authority who could have submitted a comprehensive report. Old Pomeroy was probably present. Putnam may have been there also, but only for short and intermittent periods. Stark's brief mention of his service would do as well for Waterloo or Armageddon as for Bunker Hill, while Knowlton tells us

us nothing of what took place along the Connecticut front. Stark makes no allusion to the Connecticut men, the New Hampshire contingent was invisible to Connecticut eyes, and we might well assume that the only Massachusetts contribution to the cause in this quarter was the fence itself and the ground upon which it was built. We may be thankful for the comments of John Chester, a captain in Spencer's Connecticut regiment, who writes clearly and who knew his business as a soldier. From him we learn that the position at the rail fence was chosen with military intelligence. "Here," he says, "nature had formed something of a breastwork, or else there had been a ditch many years agone."

We know that defending the fence were the two New Hampshire regiments of Stark and Reed and the Connecticut contingent under Knowlton, and it appears that, with the exception of Prescott's regiment in the redoubt, they were the only considerable American detachments who came on the field and stayed and fought as units.* Stark's position was on the extreme left of the line near the Mystic, while Knowlton, reinforced before four o'clock by certain Connecticut companies from Cambridge, was on the right, at the westerly end of the fence where the line turned sharply to join the

* This may seem unjust, particularly to such regiments as those of Frye, Little, and Bridge. Their joint losses in the action are given as 120, which would indicate that they kept at least seven or eight hundred men in action. There are indications, however, that these regiments broke up into smaller units which entered the fight at different points.

breastwork.* In the interval between these detachments, and probably interspersed with them, were such of the Massachusetts men as had made their way to this front, and all of the defenders on Knowlton's right between the fence and the breastwork were doubtless also of Massachusetts commands. The first firing probably began in front of the redoubt, to draw attention from Howe's advance along the Mystic,† but the first attack fell upon Stark. He was shrewd enough to discover that his position could be turned by a column moving along the beach under cover of the bank. It is alleged that he had stones rolled down to the water's edge and constructed some sort of rough defence for his protection. De Berniere's British map tends to confirm the supposition, showing the line of the fence carried far out across the beach. We should remember that the beach was then at its narrowest stage, it being high water at thirty-four minutes after three. The tidal conditions undoubtedly favored Stark and impeded his enemy.

Instead of achieving a bloodless flank movement, Howe, as we have seen, found himself the victim of an American ambush and soon abandoned his fruitless offensive against the fence. Although not present at the beginning of the engagement, Chester hears that the "first firings" of the Americans "swept down the

* Page shows the line between the two Provincial works as a southwesterly extension of the rail fence and refers to it as a hedge. There was doubtless scattered cover along this line, but it probably afforded but slight protection to its defenders.

† Despite Howe's statement, I have followed Page and assumed that Pigot's early activities were designed as a feint.

enemy

enemy most amazingly" and so disconcerted them "that they partly broke and retreated." They "again rallied and advanced and in the same manner were repulsed a second, and some say a third time." Toward the close of the action occurred that sharp combat at the angle on the right of this line in which Chester and his friend Lieutenant Samuel B. Webb bore their part. Their company arrived just before the redoubt was abandoned. With well-filled ammunition pouches, the men began their fire "very briskly; the regulars fell in great plenty; but to do them justice, they kept a grand front, and stood their ground nobly."* The Connecticut men held their position until the fugitives from the redoubt reached them, Chester being of the opinion that his command "fought standing about six minutes,"† when they were swept back in the tide of retreat.

We are all familiar with the standardized story of Bunker Hill — the slow imposing advance of the troops, the hush that broods over the scene as the cannonading ceases and the attackers approach the works, the sudden crash of the American musketry, the wavering, bending, and cracking of the British line, which at last is swept down the hill in utter defeat to where their boats await them. Then the activities of the British officers as they strive to bring order out of chaos, employing the points of their swords against their men;

* *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, XIV, 62.
† Frothingham, *Siege*, p. 391.

the

the gradual reforming of the lines, and then the second slow advance with the same disastrous results. Far down the slope, the refugees are again halted, knapsacks and blankets are thrown away, and goaded still by the swords of their officers, the men are more driven than led up the hill to where this time victory awaits them. The intervals between these assaults suggest the intermissions between acts at the opera or those that separate the halves in a modern football contest. Conversation flows behind the rail fence and in the redoubt, congratulations are exchanged, words of encouragement are passed about, and there is speculation whether the stricken battalions will dare to come up again. It is a general attack all along the front from Charlestown to the Mystic.

Thacher's report affords the only basis for this tale, and that report we shall later examine in detail. The rest of the contemporaneous evidence is unimaginative and laconic. Isaac Lothrop hears that the Provincials "obliged the enemy twice to give way."* General Heath writes that the fire "staggered, and even broke them, but they rallied, and returning to the charge again and again, drove the Americans from the lines."† On every hand it was the common talk in the American camp that the British had been twice repulsed. Now we know that the Light Infantry failed against the American left and that Pigot was thrown back at the redoubt, these incidents occurring at different times

* *Historical Magazine*, p. 374. † *Memoirs* (1901), p. 13.

and

and in different places. I recall no witness previous to 1818 who alleged that he personally saw the two repulses that everyone reported as having occurred. We might construct a very reasonable theory that the men who served in the redoubt conferred with those who had fought at the fence, and that from such intercourse came the story of the double repulse.

This explanation appeals to me, and it allows us to nurse the pious hope that in the misadventures of the Grenadiers there were other checks of the sort inflicted upon Pigot to be credited to the American arms. What thrilled the Provincials in 1775 was that their raw militia had at this point or that seen the regulars break and retreat. Accepting the well-established fact, we may yet query the truth of the standardized story of the battle with its long intermissions and its hordes of terrified soldiers running up hill and down dale a good half-mile to their boats. My contention is simply that the ebb and flow of the British attacks was confined to the ground that lay between the American defences and a line approximating that marked on Page's map as Howe's Second Position.* The question of time has an important bearing on the case. I think we are justified in believing that not more than an hour elapsed between the first musketry fire and the retreat of the

* The British do not discuss the action in terms of repulses, but as a continuous engagement of varying fortunes in which ground was won and lost, until their objective was gained. Charles Stuart writes that the troops "renewed the charge again and again," which are almost the exact words of the American General Heath, quoted on the previous page. Lord Rawdon admits that "at one time the chances were against us."

American army. The Committee of Safety says "about an hour." Captain Chester, accepting the statement of an eye-witness, says "thirty-five minutes."* John Winthrop says "above an hour." † Isaac Lothrop, "about an hour." ‡ These extracts show the trend of American opinion. Even Prescott's guess of one hour and twenty minutes did not control the finding of the Committee of Safety. The American estimates of time find confirmation in the statements of the combatants and non-combatants on the other side of the Charles. Their figures run from forty minutes to an hour.§

Would any soldier say, unless you could convince him that it took at least 120 minutes to make an hour, that it would have been possible in so short a period, for the British to march up the hill three times at their slow pace, to be routed twice, and to undergo in the intervals the radical reorganization that was twice necessary, according to the prevalent story? Is such a story justified by contemporaneous evidence? I am not dogmatizing, but submit these queries for your consideration. The evidence of 1818 remains vital and intact for those who prefer to use it.

The outstanding feature of the defence was the fire

* Frothingham, *Siege*, p. 390.

† 5 *Massachusetts Historical Collections*, IV, 292.

‡ Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1089; *Historical Magazine*, p. 374.

§ Reverend Andrew Eliot says the action lasted "perhaps an hour." (*Historical Magazine*, p. 369.) The Merchant in Boston has it "three quarters of an hour." (Force, 4 *American Archives*, II, 1079.) I. Waller, officer on a British ship, thought "about forty minutes." (Letter in my possession.) "Another account" from Boston says "after an obstinate attack of an hour." (Rivington's *Gazetteer*, July 13, 1775.)

control

control maintained all along the line. That undisciplined men, crowding to the walls for the chance to rest a musket, with units broken and intermixed, should have been amenable to such control is an astounding fact.* Its efficacy was acknowledged by the British, whose slow advance in line contributed to its murderous effect. Possibly the men at the fence were good marksmen, but whatever their skill in this respect, it was their marvellous restraint that staggered the attackers at different points. Poorer shots than these Provincials might have wrought as great havoc with that close-packed and glittering target moving leisurely on into point-blank range.

Stark and his associates have been criticized in some quarters for not emerging from their stronghold when the fighting waned on their front, to disperse the thin red line before them. But all semblance of units had disappeared behind the fence, the men could not have been moved even as companies, they were at best ill-trained in field evolutions, and bayonets were few and far between. Then Stark doubtless held in high respect that depleted force of Grenadiers and Light Infantry, and may have noted also that the fire of the Royal Artillery was becoming painfully precise and effective. He had prevented a great American disaster and did not propose at the eleventh hour to play into the hands of the British Commander. The prudent policy adopted by the

* Captain Chester's letter: "We lost our regularity, as every company had done before us, and fought as they did, every man loading and firing as fast as he could." (Frothingham, *Siege*, p. 391.)

defenders

defenders of the rail fence recalls appreciatively the lines of the poet:

> 'Tain't a knowin' kind o' cattle
> Thet is ketched with mouldy corn.

We come now to a brief consideration of the numbers engaged and the losses sustained. We have to consider these questions together, as one has a bearing upon the other. The early letters and newspaper accounts give the Provincial strength as from five to seven hundred men. The Committee of Safety says "about 1500." Washington, doubtless following this report, repeats the same figure. Putnam is quoted as saying "fifteen hundred at first & 700 afterwards."* This, although capable of two interpretations, has been taken to mean 2200. Stark, writing two days after the battle, thought that "about 2500" men were with Prescott alone.† Samuel Swett early in the nineteenth century gave the number as "fluctuating," but to be "fairly estimated at 3500 who joined in the battle, and 500 more who covered the retreat." Frothingham thought the number engaged at any one time was 1500, while perhaps 1000 more bore some part in the action. Dawson returned to the eighteenth-century estimate of 1500. The persistence of 1500 is doubtless due to the report of the Committee of Safety. In the confusion and uncertainty at the time, it may well have been assumed that

* Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1, 576.

† Footnote to his letter written to Matthew Thornton, June 19, 1775. (*New Hampshire Revolutionary Papers*, 1, 301.)

such

such data as existed were in the hands of the committee at Cambridge.

It may be that the coming and going of the men on fleeting visits to the front during the progress of the battle has been exaggerated by modern writers. In the first place, as we have seen, the action was of very short duration. Moreover, men who had crossed the fire-swept area between Bunker and Breed's Hills might well have considered that they were as safe at the front as in retracing those perilous steps. Our only record of desertions comes from the redoubt before the British advance had begun.

As for losses, the first feeling among the Provincials was that they had suffered lightly. Estimates in the earliest accounts range from one to two hundred. General Ward's memorandum in his orderly book says 420 killed and wounded and 30 captured, while the Provincial Congress report gives us, according to "an exact return," a total of 449. Samuel Gray writes on July 12, 1775: "I think our loss can never be ascertained with precision, as the order, regularity, and discipline, of the troops from this province, is so deficient that no return can be made which is to be relied upon. However, the returns, for many reasons, . . . will exceed rather than fall short of the real loss." * Gray may have had in mind that good old American custom, ante-dating the French and Indian wars, which led soldiers to exaggerate their ills for the purpose of securing from time to time in the

* Frothingham, *Siege*, p. 394.

future

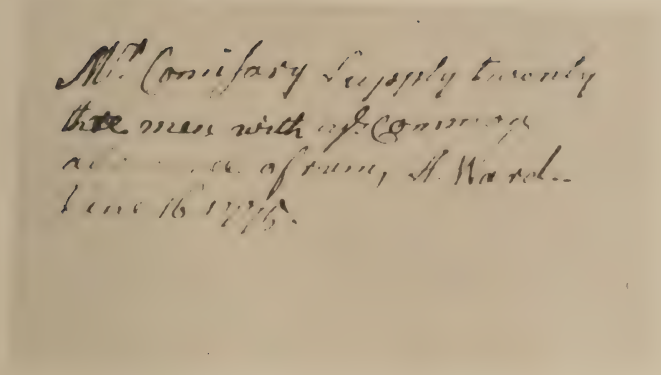
future special remuneration from a grateful government. At all events, hundreds of petitions are still in existence from alleged veterans of Bunker Hill praying for that which in modern times we style a pension, bonus, adjusted compensation, or what you will.

What we regard to-day as the official report of losses is that offered by Mr. Frothingham in his History of the Siege, made up, as he tells us, "from letters, official returns, and an article in a Providence newspaper," where the casualties are listed by regiments.* He makes the total figure 441, which is sufficiently in harmony with the estimates of Ward and the Committee of Safety. No one now can improve on Mr. Frothingham's statistics, and for our purpose a figure of 441 is quite close enough. If we accept this total, it is not without value in determining the number of men engaged. Perhaps the gentlemen composing the Massachusetts Committee, in preparing their report, may have been tempted to accept minimum figures for the Provincial numbers. They were writing for British consumption. They may not have been conscious at the time of the strength of their allies in the field. At all events, their estimate of 1500 Americans in action must be regarded as a severe if unconscious reflection upon their own province. The truth is that New Hampshire and Connecticut alone had more than a thousand men at the rail fence,† which compels

* *Ibid.*, p. 193, note.

† See the following documents printed in the *New Hampshire Revolutionary Papers*, from the originals in the custody of the New Hampshire Historical

Autograph Order of General Artemas Ward



compels the conclusion that less than five hundred of the five thousand Massachusetts troops ordered forward by Ward reached the firing line. It suggests also that, save for the detachment that stood by Prescott in the midst of the morning's desertions, no Massachusetts soldier descended the slope of Bunker Hill to strike a blow in defence of Massachusetts soil. Here is a dilemma that seems to have escaped the attention of Massachusetts writers, who had faith in the Committee's report. I understand that on Bunker Hill there is a tablet stating that "the American troops engaged numbered 1500," and that they "were mainly from Massachusetts." I respectfully submit that one or the other of the assertions must be incorrect.

Fortunately, we have not only the approximate strength of the New Hampshire and Connecticut forces, but their losses as well. From New Hampshire 86 men were killed or wounded, from Connecticut 45. This makes a total loss of 131 in the two detachments, and if we choose to estimate their strength at not over one thousand men, it means that their casualties amounted to thirteen per cent of their number. De-

torical Society. The roster of Reed's Regiment is dated June 14, 1775, signed by the Adjutant, and gives the total strength as 637 officers and men. Deducting the officers and ineffectives leaves 377 rank and file present and fit for duty. The Provision Return of Stark's Regiment, dated July 1, 1775, calls for 794 officers and men after eliminating those slain in the battle. Making the same percentage of reduction as in the case of Reed's Regiment, leaves us with 477 effective private men. To the 864 men in these regiments should be added at least 350 for the Connecticut contingent, or a total from both Provinces of 1214. There has been no hint of any desertions in these commands nor does there seem any reason to question that they took the field with full ranks and stayed to see the business through.

ducting

ducting the figure 131 from the total Provincial loss of 441 leaves 310 casualties to be borne by Massachusetts commands. According to the Providence newspaper and other data used by Frothingham, the losses involved, to a greater or less extent, fourteen regiments, all those, in fact, who rest under any suspicion of having been ordered to the front by Ward. Now if the percentage of loss in the Massachusetts troops was the same as that suffered by the New Hampshire and Connecticut forces, their casualties of 310 represented thirteen per cent of their numbers in the field. We should then reckon that 2400 instead of 500 of Ward's army participated in the battle, and that the defenders of the Breed's Hill lines aggregated nearly 3500 men. Such a computation, curiously enough, brings us into close harmony with Swett's guess of nearly one hundred years ago. If you choose to believe that Massachusetts suffered heavier proportionate loss than her allies, if you insist upon twenty instead of thirteen per cent for her, you still have 1600 Massachusetts men in action, 2600 manning the lines, and find yourself in harmony with Frothingham. It is an interesting problem, the distribution of the Massachusetts army between the firing line and the crowded and disordered rear. If I am not disqualified, as a Massachusetts man, from hazarding an opinion in the matter, I should say that there are solid grounds for the hope that, including Prescott's detachment, at least two thousand of Ward's soldiers, commanded and uncommanded, principally in small units

units and groups, found their way to where death and danger lurked.

I should be violating a time-honored tradition, if in these rambling notes on Bunker Hill I omitted some specific mention of what controversialists have specified as "the command." Of course, you have divined my opinion that in the nature of things there could have been no dominating oversight or direction of the field. It is amazing to me that there could ever have been a controversy upon the subject, a political controversy in which even Daniel Webster mingled and which he thought not unworthy of his steel. Charles Lee would hardly have been selected for any judicial quality that resided in him to umpire a matter of this sort, and yet it would have been well for New England had it rested content with the verdict he pronounced in his "Vindication": "The Americans were composed, in part, of raw lads and old men, half armed, with no practice or discipline, commanded without order, and God knows by whom."*

Prescott was the presiding genius at the redoubt. His claim to fame has never been disputed, and after eighteen hours of toil and vigil he waged his battle with a stout heart. The services of Putnam are less clearly defined, less recognizable perhaps because of the

* Frothingham, quoting this passage, vaguely attributed it to Lee's "Vindication," published in 1778. (*Siege*, p. 375.) "General Lee's Vindication to the Public," prefaced by a brief note from Lee himself, was printed in the *Pennsylvania Packet* of December 3, 1778: see Lee Papers III., 225–65 (*Collections*, New York Historical Society for 1873), where the passage in question occurs on p. 262.

fervid

fervid protestations of over-zealous friends. But this much may be said for him, that if he did play the coward or poltroon at Bunker Hill, it was for the first and only time in a long, honorable, and courageous life.

We began our review of the Provincial activities at Bunker Hill by some comments upon the army at Cambridge. Out of this seeming welter of disorder and insubordination we have seen emerge those sturdy defenders of the Breed's Hill lines. Whatever their numbers, though lacking the confidence and inspiration that comes from discipline and leadership, they withstood unshaken a prolonged bombardment by land and sea and dared to face in arms the trained battalions of the King.

Beyond Bunker Hill and the isthmus were the hundreds and perhaps thousands of stragglers who had failed to meet the test.* They were called cowards in their day, though we judge them more kindly now. But those mightier souls who found strength and joy in battle — their achievement forms the most impressive fact in the story of Bunker Hill.

* The best account of the confusion in the rear is to be found in Captain Chester's letter. (Frothingham, *Siege*, pp. 389–91.)

III

THE REVEREND PETER THACHER'S REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF SAFETY

III

THE REVEREND PETER THACHER'S REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF SAFETY

HAD Washington arrived in Cambridge a month earlier than he did with his continental commission to command the armies of the associated Provinces then employed in the leaguer of Boston, there would probably have been no battle of Bunker Hill. It is certain that had the action occurred during his command, it would have been conducted by some field officer duly assigned to the task, who would have submitted to the Commander-in-Chief some comprehensive report of his military stewardship. As it was, there being no supreme authority either on or off the field, there seems to have been no attempt to secure a detailed report of the action. Indeed, no one had the authority to demand, and no one was competent to prepare, such a document. Ward having no clear comprehension of what had happened wisely concluded to let sleeping dogs lie. It was political necessity that finally induced the Massachusetts authorities to take some action in the matter.

On July 6, 1775, the Massachusetts Committee of Safety passed the following vote: "This Committee have, with great concern, considered the advantages our

our enemies will derive from General Gage's misrepresentations of the battle of Charlestown, unless counteracted by the truth of that day's transactions being fairly and honestly represented to our friends and others in Great Britain; therefore, Resolved, That it be humbly recommended to the honorable Congress, now sitting at Watertown, to appoint a committee to draw up and transmit to Great Britain, as soon as possible, a fair, honest, and impartial account of the late battle at Charlestown, on the 17th ultimo, so that our friends, and others in that part of the world, may not be, in any degree, imposed upon by General Gage's misrepresentations of that day's transactions; and that there also be a standing committee for that purpose."

The Congress acted promptly and on the following day ordered "That the said Committee of Safety be a Committee for that purpose, and that they likewise be a Standing Committee for that and like purposes." With this authority, the Committee appointed a sub-committee, consisting not of soldiers but of three clergymen, the Reverend Dr. Cooper, the Reverend Mr. Gardner, and the Reverend Mr. Peter Thacher, to prepare a suitable account of the battle (for the purposes named,) and on July 25th, or within a few days thereafter, there was sent to England the document that has long been popularly regarded as the American official account of Bunker Hill. We should not now regard the clergy as the most promising body from which to select a military historian, but, as I have said, the crisis

was

was political rather than military in its nature and the worthy parsons produced a document that on the whole must be regarded as creditable to them.

Cooper and Gardner may have had some misgivings as to their qualifications for the task, but, at all events, the principal burden seems to have fallen upon the shoulders of the youthful and inexperienced Thacher, then twenty-four years of age and pastor of the church in Malden. There is in the Cabinet of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester what appears to be his original draft of the report he submitted to the Committee of Safety.* It is closely and hastily scrawled on four small quarto pages, disfigured by an amazing number of additions, alterations, and erasures. Accompanying it is another document of even greater importance for us. This is signed by Thacher and is evidently a minute written to introduce or to accompany a copy of his report made from the original at a considerably later date. The copy itself is missing, but the signed minute I shall, for the purposes of our discussion, designate as the preamble.† It runs in part as follows:

* Printed in the *Proceedings* of the American Antiquarian Society, New Series, XIX, 438, and also in Dawson's Bunker Hill number of the *Historical Magazine*, June, 1868.

† It has been assumed that the manuscript of Thacher's report at Worcester was the copy to which the preamble refers. A recent inspection of both documents has convinced me that the assumption is an error. The report itself is unmistakably of much earlier date than the preamble and the tinkering to which it has been subjected precludes any possibility of its being a copy. The preamble itself is carefully written on more modern paper and in different ink. I may add that my conclusion is supported by the judgment of Mr. Brigham, of the Antiquarian Society, and Mr. Tuttle, of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

lows: "The following account was written by a person who was an eye-witness of the battle of Bunker's Hill. Some of the circumstances the intervention of the hill prevented him from seeing, for he stood on the north side of Mystic river. What facts he did not see himself were communicated to him by Col. Prescott (who commanded the provincials,) and by other persons who were personally conversant in the scenes which this narration describes. It was drawn up within one fortnight after the 17th of June, 1775, while events were recent in the minds of the actors and it is now faithfully copied from the draught then made in a great hurry."

From the document the following confused and ambiguous sentence has been stricken out: "He remembers well however the precipitate retreat of the british troops to the beach and the exertions of the officers to rally and carry them on again to action; this was fair by us for at the moment he ardently wished they might be unsuccessful." In eliminating this passage it would seem as though Thacher was eliminating himself as an eye-witness of the British repulses. I shall indulge myself later in a word of speculation as to when and why this erasure was made.

Jeremy Belknap says that Thacher's post of observation was near a house on the Malden side of the Mystic near the Penny Ferry, a house that is shown on Gordon's map in the second volume of his history. This map is topographically incorrect, but we can find the same

Part of the "Preamble" of the Rev. Peter Thacher, showing Erasure

The following account was written by a person who was an eye witness of the battle of Bunker's hill. Some of the circumstances the intervention of the hill prevented him from seeing, for he stood on the north east side of Mystic river.
~~He remembers and knows the particular extent of the British troops to the lands and the operations of the officers to rally and carry them on again to battle, this was seen for all the account is worthy with the [illegible]~~
~~or misconceived~~. What facts he did not see himself were communicated to him by Col. Prescot (who commanded the provincials) and by other persons who were personally conver-

same building on Pelham's admirable plan and must conclude, I think, that for an observer of the battle, Thacher was singularly ill-placed. Evidently he was not provided with a glass and he was three-quarters of a mile from the Mystic end of the rail fence and more than a mile from the British landing place at Moulton's Point. Parts of the beach between the point and the fence were probably visible from where he stood, but the battlefield itself, except for the extreme left, where the New Hampshire men were posted, no glass in the world could have brought within his range of vision. His statement that "some of the circumstances the intervention of the hill prevented him from seeing" might have been profitably amended by substituting the word "most" for "some." Clearly his narrative was founded largely upon what he and his colleagues were told, and they may well have been perplexed by the conflict of opinion they encountered and wearied by honest efforts to separate the wheat from the chaff. Prescott is the only witness cited by Thacher, and he could have known little of certain matters which the report discusses. It would be interesting to know if Thacher held communion with Stark or Putnam concerning the happenings of the day. The services of New Hampshire and Connecticut are not mentioned in Thacher's draft or in the resulting report. Thacher was a conscientious man and aglow with patriotic fervor, but to say that he was altogether devoid of the suspicions and jealousies that inspired the leaders of the

the allied Provinces would be perhaps to proclaim him as something more than human.

The Committee's published report* was complimentary to Thacher, inasmuch as with a little smoothing here and there it followed closely what he had written. There were certain alterations, seemingly slight but sometimes significant. A paragraph or two were added after it left his hands to give it more the character of a fair, honest, and impartial account, so we find allusions to "those miscreants who have introduced desolation and havock into these once happy abodes of liberty, peace and plenty," and to the "ridiculous parade of triumph" with which the troops occupied the captured hill, and learn that "the officers and soldiers of the Ministerial army meanly exult in having gained this ground." The report closes with references to "Ministerial assassins" and "rapacious despots." But these additions were political utterances to offset the effect of Gage's misrepresentations in England. The blame or credit for them does not belong to Thacher.

The most radical change made by the Committee in Thacher's report concerns the duration of the battle. The young parson in his remote station, if provided with a watch, should have been a good authority on this matter, but his statement of exactly "one hour and a half" was altered to read "about an hour." Perhaps

* Printed in Frothingham's *Siege, Historical Magazine* (June, 1868), and elsewhere.

Thacher had no watch; at all events, his estimate of time must have run counter to the general weight of opinion.

Thacher states that Charlestown burst into flames at the instant the British began their slow advance. His inference was that the enemy fired the place "to favour their attack upon o^{r} Lines by the Smoke which y^{y} imagined w^{d} have been blown directly y^{t} away & thence covered them in y^{r} attack but the wind changing at this instant it was carried another way." * Although accepting the time at which Charlestown was fired, the Committee adds a theory of their own, that perhaps the British design was "to rout or destroy one or two Regiments of Provincials who had been posted in that Town," but which had been "already removed." This seems an unnecessary as well as a somewhat damning interpolation in a report offered to refute the statements of the British commander-in-chief. The Provincial contention that the burning of Charlestown was an act of unprovoked barbarity receives its death-blow in this phrase of the Committee's report. If the regiments were already removed when Charlestown began to burn, we must assume that they were there just before the event. Is it likely that they lingered in the village with entirely peaceful intent? The British contention

* Belknap doubted this in 1789. See his letter to Hazard, September 3, 1789, where he says "the circumstance of the wind shifting that day, and carrying the smoke *another* course is said to be not true. It was S.W. the whole day, and cinders of the fire were carried over to Chelsea; the smoke in fact incommoded the enemy, but not the intrenchment."

was

was that Pigot was exceedingly hurt by the musketry from the village. Of course, the fire may have ceased before the battery in Boston began to bomb the place; a half-hour may have elapsed between the time of Pigot's complaint to Howe and the receipt of Howe's orders by the Major Generals on Copp's Hill.*

The two outstanding statements in Thacher's report which call for comment are, first, his version of the fighting at the Mystic end of the rail fence, and, second, his reference to the repeated flights of the British to their boats. Having described the abandonment of the redoubt, the Committee's report, following Thacher closely, goes on to say: "The retreat of this little handful of brave men would have been effectually cut off, had it not happened that the flanking party of the enemy, which was to have come up on the back of the redoubt, was checked by a party of Provincials, who fought with the utmost bravery, and kept them from advancing farther than the beach. The engagement of these two parties was kept up with the utmost vigour; and it must be acknowledged that this party of the Ministerial Troops evidenced a courage worthy of a better cause. All their efforts, however, were insufficient to compel the Provincials to retreat, till their main body had left the hill." Except for the mention

* The burning of Charlestown occasioned not only bitter Provincial denunciation against "those bloody incendiaries," but expressions of regret in the British camp. Our New England ancestors stolidly refused to concede that the use of houses as fortresses constituted a valid reason for their destruction in battle.

of

of "the flanking party" and "the beach," this passage could be accepted as a just tribute to the steadiness and fortitude of the men at the rail fence. But there was only one beach to which the British could have been held, and that was on the Mystic side, and both British and American evidence is all to the effect that the repulse of Howe's flanking movement in that quarter was a prologue and not an epilogue to the battle. In other words, it is difficult to escape the conviction that Thacher got his accounts mixed and that his chronology is wrong. We are already convinced, I think, that Howe had no sufficient force with which to undertake an offensive in that part of the field at the close of the action.

In regard to the second point, the repeated flights of the enemy to their boats. So far as Thacher was concerned, their long journeys ended at "the point where they landed," or at "their boats," in which some of the men took refuge, while "spectators on the opposite shore" saw the officers come down to them and "use the most passionate gestures and even to push forward ye men with their swords." The incident occurred, if it did occur, on the Mystic shore near Moulton's Point. This, as I have said, was ground probably within the range of Thacher's vision as he stood more than a mile away at the Penny Ferry and there was a time somewhere between 1775 and 1789 when he honestly believed he had seen with his own eyes the terrified soldiers climbing into their boats. It was not only a good

good half-mile from Moulton's Point to the line of the rail fence and about the same distance from the beach to the redoubt, but the land was rough and crossed and recrossed by walls and fences. Yet though the British had so far to go and so much to do, the Committee, as we have seen, could allow them but an hour for their repeated advances, reorganizations, and routs. Perhaps they felt that Thacher was protesting too much in these details of the affair; at all events, it is certain that by the alteration of a single word they achieved a significant compromise in his narrative. His statement that the troops fled a second time to their boats, the Committee amends to read "toward" instead of "to." So in its final form the report has the British flying once to the beach, many of the men seeking refuge in their boats, and when they broke again on a second attack retreating *toward* the same point. I have said that the alteration is significant. Perhaps it was the subject of discussion before it was consigned to print.

Out of this paragraph there came a correspondence in 1789 that is not only amusing but important. In 1788 the Reverend William Gordon published in England his history of the war and the Committee's report formed the basis for his narrative of Bunker Hill. Indeed his words are virtually those of Thacher. His allegation, as to the flight of the troops to their boats was too much for his British audience and he was roundly accused, particularly in military quarters, of gross prevarication. Although he had the Committee's report to sustain him,

him, he determined to secure the evidence of reputable eye-witnesses to confound his critics. So in much perturbation of mind he addressed a letter to his friend Ebenezer Hazard in America, saying that he had no doubt of the truth of his statements and that the military men in England were "for saving *the British honor*." He is under the impression that the Reverend Mr. Thacher was an eye-witness of the disputed event and begs Hazard to get into touch with him "and others with him, to attest the veracity of the historian in every part of the paragraph."*

On August 8, 1789, Hazard wrote to Jeremy Belknap in Boston, describing Gordon's predicament and requesting definite confirmation of his statements. Now Belknap was no admirer of Gordon and did not altogether relish the request. But on August 19 he writes to Hazard that little as he likes the task, he will confer not only with Thacher, but with "another" who viewed the battle from a more advantageous position. He warns Hazard that neither of these gentlemen cherishes any regard for Gordon and that he may have difficulty in getting them to stand forth to substantiate anything he has written.

Belknap determines not to approach Thacher at once, but gets into touch with his other witness, who, he tells us, saw the battle from a hill in Chelsea and was supplied with a perspective glass. His worst fears were

* For this correspondence see 1 *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, XIV, 93–98.

realized.

realized. The man despised Gordon and was inclined to be non-communicative. Apparently he refused to comment on the controverted question, but did state that other parts of the battle and of the affair at Lexington had both been misrepresented by the historian. In a letter to Hazard dated August 25, Belknap expresses his own belief in the truth of Gordon's account and regrets the attitude of a promising witness. "His ill opinion of G. as an historian makes him decline lending his name to support anything that he has said."

Belknap now turns to Thacher and to his surprise finds him "rather more candidly disposed" than he had hoped. Indeed, Thacher assured him "of the fact which he observed with his own eyes, viz: that the British troops retreated *to their boats* and that the officers were busily engaged in getting them to march up." In his letter to Hazard, dated September 3, Belknap paraphrases Thacher's words as follows: "The enemy landed on Morton's Point, and some of the boats came round the point to a bight or cove which you may see in the plan, so as to be in view of the place where he stood, and these were the boats to which he saw some of them retreat. Other boats remained on the side of the point next to Boston, these were out of his view." This information was, of course, precisely what Gordon hoped to get, and Hazard may well have been pleased that his efforts on behalf of his friend had been so completely rewarded. What, then, must have been his surprise to receive a fortnight later, another letter from Belknap dated

dated September 19, and containing the following words: "Enclosed you have a paper copied by Mr. Thacher from an account he wrote of the Charlestown battle while it was young and fresh, and which he is willing Dr. Gordon should have. He says, upon farther recollection, that he is not certain *that boats came round Morton's Point;* but he is sure they were driven down to the edge of the water by our people's fire, and driven up again by their own officers. I am willing to be the instrument of conveying any information or correction to Dr. G., but do not desire *to be known or spoken of* as such."

Now Thacher's manuscript offering to Gordon was not a priceless gift, as it was probably nothing but a copy of what he had written for the Committee of Safety in 1775. It may indeed have been the very copy for which the preamble at Worcester was designed as an introduction. Thacher, like Belknap, may have concluded that he did not wish "*to be known*" as assisting Gordon, and so, while placing his copy at Hazard's disposal, decided at the last moment to retain the signed evidence of his authorship. Despite the fact that he felt certain matters did happen as Gordon narrates, his erasure in the preamble and his elimination of the boats in his correspondence leave it conjectural as to whether he ever saw any retreat "to the edge of the water."* What

* Thacher's belated suspicion that he saw no boats was doubtless well founded. After the first detachment was safely landed, the boats were sent across the river to embark the reserve and were later engaged in transporting the two additional battalions sent over by Gage.

happened

happened in the fortnight between Belknap's interview with Thacher and the receipt of the latter's final word upon the subject? Did Thacher have a resurgence of vindictive feeling toward Gordon, or are his corrections to be attributed to the writhings of a New England conscience? Here is a chance for speculation. Perhaps Thacher, in seeking to refresh his memory, became so confused as to what he had seen, heard, or dreamed, that he made the erasure in his preamble at that time and confided his honest doubts to Belknap. At all events, so far as Gordon was concerned, Thacher was eliminated as an eye-witness. Poor Gordon was too British for the Americans of 1789, and he was too American for the British of that day. He learned, as many others were destined to learn, that whoever stirred the smouldering ashes of Bunker Hill must not complain of burns. He fell miserably between two stools; his witnesses failed him, and the report of the Committee of Safety remained for him as it does for us the only authority for the almost incredible statement of the flights of the King's troops to their boats. If Thacher's work ranks low as an historical authority, the fault lies rather with his informants than with him. The young Malden clergyman did not love the public enemy, and he was no advocate for turning the other cheek, yet he wrote in a judicial spirit rare among the partisans of his time. To him we are indebted for the least unfair and the least partial of all the Fair and Impartial Accounts issued by the local Revolutionary leaders during those stormy years from 1770 to 1775.

IV

THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE REVEREND JOHN MARTIN

IV

THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE REVEREND JOHN MARTIN

AMONG the New England patriots of 1775, none was more staunch and conscientious in his convictions than the Reverend Ezra Stiles, and among his busiest days — as revealed in his diary — must be classed those immediately following Bunker Hill, when in his Newport parsonage he was striving vainly to reconcile the conflicting reports that reached him of the action. He was the victim of prejudice, but he strove to be broad-minded in his search for truth, and would confer with young Mr. Vassall of undoubted Tory proclivities as he would with a parishioner who came to him fresh from a perusal of General Greene's latest letter from the front. If he mourned over the loss of the Charlestown peninsula, he found comfort in mathematics. What engrossed him was the question of the numbers engaged and particularly of the losses inflicted upon the enemies of his country. He fell into confusion worse confounded and for months his diary is filled with labored statistical computations. He believes that Gage's official report of casualties was issued to deceive. At one time he satisfies himself that the British return of 1054 killed and wounded, contained the dead alone, and proceeds joyously to compute the probable number of the wounded based

based upon this figure of the slain. He convinces himself that the British casualties aggregated four thousand men, then on more mature reflection reduces his estimate to three thousand. He finds the Provincial losses to have been only 355. "Thus," he says, "this Victory was so ordered by providence to prove a Tenfold Loss to the King's Troops."

Then doubts beset him. He becomes "apprehensive" that perhaps after all Gage's return may have included both dead and wounded. He sees "such incessant, insidious Stratagems and Delusions practised by the Army, Navy and Tories," that he is oppressed by bewilderment and inspired with righteous indignation.

In the midst of his statistical activities Stiles was contributing much to our knowledge of the battle by including in his diary certain conversations and letters bearing upon the subject, notably the valuable relic of Private Peter Brown. We have also to thank him for the most entertaining of all records of the battle, the narrative of that militant Irish clergyman, the Reverend John Martin.

It should be noted here that this story of Martin's has long been cited as an authority on Bunker Hill and I think always with respect. Copies of his narrative were transcribed from the Stiles manuscript about the middle of the nineteenth century and were called to the attention of Mr. Frothingham when he was writing his *History of the Siege of Boston*, by President Sparks and Mr. Bancroft. Dawson published the tale in 1868

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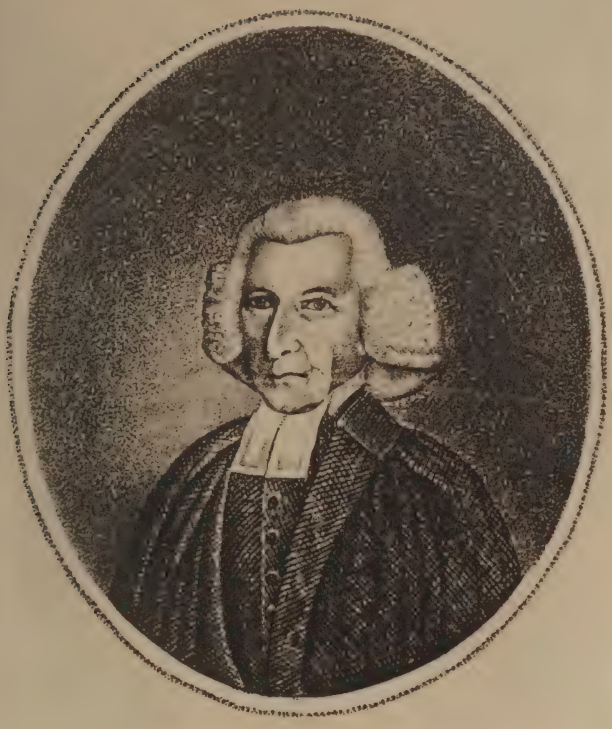

EZRA STILES S.T.D. L.L.D.

President of Yale College.

as an appendix to his *Historical Magazine* article of that year. Stiles's *Diary* was first published in 1901.* The surprising thing is that neither Stiles himself, nor any subsequent writer conversant with Martin's utterances seems to have suspected that he was dealing with something unique in the way of an historical document, that here was, in fact, a remarkable story, deserving of special analysis and treatment. I purpose to give a rapid paraphrase of Stiles on Martin with such running comments as the material suggests.

It was on June 30 that Martin knocked at the parsonage door in Newport. "Mr. Martin," says Stiles, "was in the whole affair from the first taking possession of Bunker's Hill to the End of the battle as Chaplain."† The toil and adventures of the night and the opening of the British bombardment in the morning are briefly described. Then early in the forenoon Colonel Gridley, the engineer, falls ill and leaves the works. Before doing so he looks about for someone competent to assume the "oversight of the finishg the Trenches," and his choice falls upon Chaplain Martin. "Thus," says Stiles, "about 1,000 Men were commanded by him while at Labor & commanded by Col. Prescott when on Guard & military Duty." At this early stage of affairs you will notice that our Chaplain is already on the high road to prominence.

* The *Diary* was not published entire, the character of the omissions being described in the preface.

† Martin claimed a Chaplain's commission in the Rhode Island Army, but his name does not appear in the State records.

Matters must have gone well in the trenches; at all events, Mr. Martin found time to go down to Charlestown Ferry and with a spy glass to study the military preparations that were making on the other side of the river. He found about two hundred of the inhabitants, men and women, still lingering in the village, but says nothing of the one or two Provincial Regiments which the Committee of Safety informs us were then in possession of that place. He called at a house for a drink of water and at that instant a cannon ball came crashing through the structure. This is, I think, the only information we have that Charlestown was then under fire, but as we shall discover later, wherever Chaplain Martin went, a cannon ball was almost sure to follow. He urged the unwilling inhabitants to leave the place promising "warm Work" ahead. As they seemed reluctant to depart, Martin returned to the hill where he endeavored to persuade Prescott to send for reinforcements, urging that his present force was too small to defend the position. Prescott differed from him, whereupon a quarrel ensued. "About Noon or before" Martin, perhaps in high dudgeon, went down to the village again. He found the people still there and a certain Mr. Cary invited him into his home for rest and refreshment after his long hours of toil and vigil. The invitation was gratefully accepted, but no sooner had the weary divine composed himself for a brief nap than another cannon ball came hurtling and splintering through these hospitable premises. So Martin

tin arose and determined to go back on the hill and have it out with Prescott. The inhabitants now abandoned the town in great haste. Possibly they had come to regard the repeated visits of our Chaplain with some misgivings.

Back on the hill Martin found Prescott still obdurate. Then he decided that here was a case for action, that the time for argument had passed. He was not the man to stand by and see the redoubt sacrificed by Colonel Prescott or another. So he ordered off a messenger himself directing him to General Ward's Headquarters in Cambridge. The result was astonishing. "About Noon, a little before or after," Putnam appeared with "a large Reinforcement." It is a curious fact that Stiles despite his recent experience with statistics and computations should have failed to notice that he had assigned the same hour for the arrival of Putnam's reinforcement which he had previously named as the time of Martin's departure for his second visit to the village.

At about this stage of the narrative, Stiles, under Martin's direction, drew a sketch of the battlefield which ranks to-day, I think, as the first American attempt to portray the scene of action. The sketch has distinct value, but Martin's narrative is of the sort that needs no elucidation. A few casualties having occurred perhaps from the cannonade, the Chaplain, as befitted his office, bestirred himself in the care and removal of the stricken. Conscious of still warmer work ahead, he left

left the lines and made his way through the terrors of the shot-swept causeway and presented himself at Headquarters in Cambridge. He was authorized by Ward "to press & employ what wagons & men he needed" for his work of Mercy. On returning he found the battle in full swing. And now we begin to suspect that the Chaplain holds a distinct predilection for Connecticut. He places the troops from that province upon ground that has been almost unanimously conceded to the men of New Hampshire. He does not mention Stark or his command and states that when the firing became heavy the Massachusetts men began to disappear, indeed "went off in shoals." Martin's position, as I have intimated, was in the rear of the rail fence close to the Mystic River. If he felt that thus far he had had a rather quiet and uneventful day, he now found himself in the midst of a terrific combat maintained chiefly by "the Welch fusileers & some Irish Troops on one side — & the Connect. Troops and Irish intermixed on the other. All the Welch were slain but *six* Men. Our Men repulsed them Vigorously and drove them," and the Irish pursued. Then it appears that not only did the Irish pursue, but that they could not be stopped, and "the Range of their Fire came to our Lines." The remark is not clear, but suggests that in their zeal the victorious Irish were unconsciously peppering their Connecticut friends with whom a few moments before they had been "intermixed." Though Stark and perhaps Pomeroy and Putnam must have been

been close at hand, it devolved upon our Chaplain to put things to rights. What could he do, a man of peace in the midst of such turmoil, confusion and carnage? He stepped forth and, says Stiles, "called to his Countrymen in Irish to return." The effect was magical, the zealous pursuers heard and obeyed their master's voice and came trooping quietly back to their appointed station.

Having straightened out one difficulty, Martin found himself involved in another. "The Connect. Men," says Stiles, "tho't the unknown Tongue betrayed Treachery," and then he dismisses the subject in the laconic words, "but it was soon rectified. They fought on." This passage is both disappointing and baffling. The pacification of the Connecticut men was clearly another triumph for Martin, but as for "fighting on," who was there left to fight unless we are to assume that the six surviving Welsh still stood their ground?

I think we may say of Martin that in addition to his partiality for Connecticut, he was deeply imbued with the pride of race. Despite his benevolent intent, he had taken the precaution the night before to gird upon his thigh what he is careful to characterize as an "Irish long sword." It was a fortunate precaution, for about the time the retreat began the British reappeared coming around the end of the fence near the Mystic. They proceeded to damn our Chaplain "for a clerical dog & fired at him & said they would have his Life." But the threat

threat was more easily made than carried out. A soldier fired at him point blank and rushed upon him with his bayonet. The threatened clergyman abandoned his merciful duties long enough to whip out his long sword and despatch his adversary "by letting out his Bowels." But the dangers of our hero were not over. Another soldier, after firing, "attacked him with the broad Sword." Stiles says that "Mr. Martin learned the Sword." That of course means nothing, but I assume that he meant to say that the reverend gentleman had learned the sword exercise. At all events, he was soon at it, cut and thrust, steel ringing on steel until the soldier fell "by a stroke on the neck." The victor saved his bowels, but lost a coat button in the encounter. There is no suggestion of pride in Martin's story of his achievements. He evidently regarded them as modest contributions to the success of the day, there being a Connecticut man in his vicinity who had "killed above twenty of the Welch fusileers" with his own hand.

Despite the confusion of the retreat, Stiles assures us that Martin "brot off his wounded." In another place he says, "I think he carried off about —— dead," leaving the number blank. Perhaps he could not read the figures in his notes and meant to have obtained them from Martin at their next meeting. Perhaps the numbers were all too legible, recording some astounding total that troubled him in his consistent effort to minimize the Provincial loss. In the early evening Martin had again safely braved the cross-fire at the Neck and had

had reached a point on the Cambridge road that might well have been regarded as immune from danger. So far he had come through unscathed except for the coat-button sliced off by the broadsword of his deceased enemy. He was busy with lint and bandages among the wounded when he learned to his sorrow that even in that secluded place he was not safe from his besetting pest. A cannon ball whirling and bounding through the twilight air searched him out in his retirement and passed close by his breast, "but without Toutching." The force was so great that he fell senseless upon the ground. "He vomited or raised much Blood," and on recovering consciousness he consented to resign himself to the care of friendly hands and to call it a day's work.

Two weeks later, on Friday, June 30, he was talking with Stiles in the parsonage at Newport and on the evening of that day he was able to preach from the text, Nehemiah, IV, 14: "Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses."

The testimony of a participant in the battle given thus privately and informally within two weeks of the event may well have attracted the attention of historians. In view of the fact that its truthfulness and value as an authority have never been questioned, I should like to raise the query whether our writers on Bunker Hill have paid to this embattled divine the full meed of honor and praise to which he was clearly entitled?

You

You will remember that in the year 1818, as the result of General Dearborn's attack upon Putnam's conduct in the battle, a fierce controversy ensued which involved successive generations and which to-day cannot be regarded as safely and finally composed. It resolved itself into a wrangle over the question as to who commanded at Bunker Hill and although there was a certain accord that in the nature of things there could have been no authorized chief, yet by some, principally of Connecticut, it was maintained that Putnam was the dominating influence in the field; while by others, principally of Massachusetts, such control as existed was ascribed to Prescott. Though neither of these men in his lifetime made any public claim to the doubtful honor, their partisans nearly half a century later did raise and savagely debate the question. Now what is there, I should like to ask, recorded of either Putnam or Prescott that compares with Martin's contribution to the management of the field?

Who assumed Gridley's functions as engineer when that officer was taken ill? It was Martin, and apparently Prescott was not even consulted in the matter. Who saw that the hill was in danger when Prescott remained blind? Martin. Who dared to quarrel with Prescott to his face and in his salutary insubordination brought Putnam to the rescue with reinforcements? It cannot be denied that Martin was the man. When in a critical moment of the battle the Irish bid fair to stampede the field, and a linguist was necessary to save the situation, who

who was there but Martin who could utter the necessary word? And when the Connecticut troops were shaken not by the enemy but by suspicions of treachery, who allayed their fears and induced them to fight on? It was Martin and always Martin. How could Stiles have failed to suspect the real importance of his guest of the thirtieth of June, 1775? How could our modern writers conversant with the Chaplain's narrative have read it, weighed it, and used it, with no conception that they were dealing with a real leader and inspirer of men? Putnam was a Brigadier in the Connecticut service but the Massachusetts soldiers cared for no orders from him. Prescott was colonel of a Massachusetts regiment, but he plainly insinuates that his orders were disobeyed by Knowlton, the Connecticut captain. Martin was only a chaplain, but no one but Prescott flouted his commands and men of all races and from all provinces, including the Commander-in-Chief at Cambridge, heeded and obeyed his lightest word. Aside from his influence in the field, I suspect that Martin has left his impress upon the first authorized American account of the battle. You remember the Chaplain's account of the last fierce struggle after the retreat begins when the British come rushing round the American left and he resorts for the first time to weapons of the flesh. The story of fighting at that time and place is, as we know, in disagreement with the evidence advanced by either side. It is sustained in the report of the Committee of Safety and in that

that alone. Now the Reverend Peter Thacher, who prepared this report, was careful to tell us that "what facts he did not see himself were communicated to him by Col. Prescot . . . and by other persons," who participated in the action. I cannot resist the conviction that among those "other persons" consulted was Chaplain Martin who was thus unconsciously preparing official confirmation of one statement that he made to Stiles.

Here ends, or did end, my paper on Chaplain Martin. I had formed certain definite views in regard to him and his story and my purpose was to conclude by giving frank expression to those opinions. Before doing so I determined to learn what I could of his career, character, forbears, and descendants, sharing with Mr. Frothingham a natural distaste to belittle the services of any of our Revolutionary heroes. My efforts to obtain information through conventional historical and genealogical channels brought no results, and then I had recourse to what should have suggested itself in the first instance as the obvious thing. I bethought me that Stiles's *Diary* was admirably indexed, and so turning to the end of Volume 3 I found in a moment that only a fragment of what Stiles had to say of Martin was known to our dead and gone historians. This happy discovery which can hardly be classed as a miracle of research, makes it possible for me to present a sequel to Martin's remarkable story of Bunker Hill. It constitutes a remarkable story concerning Martin himself as revealed

revealed by Stiles. In the interest of brevity, I shall submit this also in the form of a paraphrase.

In the first place it appears that it was on April 16, 1775, two months before Bunker Hill, that Stiles first met or first mentions Martin. On that Sabbath Martin preached for Stiles "all day." As the result of this association Stiles made some entries in his diary. There is nothing as to the character or efficacy of the sermons but we learn what is more to our purpose. Martin was perhaps twenty-four years old. "He was born in Ireld & educated at a Romish Academy or Seminary at W. Meath. Tho' an Episcopal Protestant, he became a Dissenter & was ordained" by "Pastors of the Independt Association in the N° of Ireld formed since 1765." This was in 1771, and he came to Nova Scotia in 1772. He was "personally acquainted and lodged with the Pretender in Ireld 1771" and received an offer from that Prince to become one of his Chaplains, he maintaining four of the Huguenot persuasion in Paris at an annual yearly salary of £120. Martin informed Stiles that the Pretender's age was about fifty-five, that he travelled "Incog thro' the three K^ms every two years" and drew from them seven or eight thousand pounds each year. "The Pretender told him he had never received the Mass, was not a Papist, but a Protestant."

Three days after this interview, on April 19, Stiles attended "Mr. Kelly's Lecture," to hear Martin preach from Galatians, v chapter, and first verse. It is not clear whether Stiles had conversed with his young friend

friend since the 16th, or whether his entries of the 19th are to be regarded as the outcome of his serious reflections upon the previous interview. He restates certain details but with more positiveness and greater elaboration. Martin, he says, was born in 1750, his father died when he was six months old, and he lived in the west of Ireland until he was seven years old, speaking and hearing nothing but old Irish. He was sent by his guardians to "The Romish Seminary" to be educated as a physician, "& studied Physic there 3½ years under a Roman Catholic professor. Tho' educated in the Chh of Engld, he became a Member of a Deistical Club" and then a Methodist, from which we may infer that whatever he was doing in the study of medicine he preserved a singularly open mind in matters of theology. He began to preach at eighteen and was twenty-two when he came to America, "having," says Stiles, "preached above six hundred Sermons the first year." Then comes this hint of humorous appreciation, "perhaps smitten with a religious Ambition to see how soon he can preach 15 Thousd or as many as Mr. Whitfield did in his whole Life."

It is not surprising to learn from Stiles that Martin was expelled from the Seminary for his Methodism. He then turned to the Seceding Presbytery in the north of Ireland for ordination but, as a student in a Catholic Seminary, he was refused recognition until he should have studied four years in Scotland. Probably he did not partake of this grim antidote, for, as we have seen, he

he was ordained in his twenty-first year. Then in Stiles's narrative the Pretender re-appears. Martin had three interviews with him and declared roundly to Stiles that he would never pray against him as a Papist, because he knew he was no Papist, adding by way of proof, that "he told him so." Stiles, unconvinced, ventured to enquire if it was not possible that the Pretender had "imposed upon him & taken him in." Then follows this picturesque phrase, "He smiled a smile of Resentment & said, you may think so if you please." The matter of the Pretender's faith was clearly much on Martin's mind. He reiterated that "Charles was no Papist" and added, "if I shd. talk so in Engld or Ireld I might perhaps be taken up — but America was a Land of Liby where Men said any Thing." I imagine that Stiles communed with himself before making his final entries for that day. I can seem to see him pacing up and down his study pondering upon the utterances of the Reverend John Martin. Then he takes his pen in hand and records his impressions. "After talking so that one would have took him to be a close Friend to the Pretender; he said he had six scars of Wounds which he had received from the Papists — one he shewed at the Edge of his Eye, made by a stone thrown at him while preaching; & then he talked as one that had been a Martyr for Protestantism. I doubt his true Character. He was educated under Jesuits. Their Subtlety is great. Would not Charles give £100 saly to a Man under the Mask of a Methodist Preacher to itinerate & carry thro' America

America at this critical Time, an Assurance that he was a Protestant, supported 4 Hugenot Chaplains, and never partook the popish Mass or Sacrament?"

On that April evening in 1775 Stiles had evidently reached an opinion of Martin not far different from the one which oppressed me in the spring of 1924 when I first perused with care his time-honored narrative of Bunker Hill. If Martin had appeared at the Newport parsonage on that historic thirtieth of June, 1775, with a view to placing his spiritual services at the disposal of Stiles for the following Sabbath, I think the conscientious New England clergyman would have found some way to be rid of him. But the Stiles of June 30 was not the Stiles of the April 19 preceding. In the meantime the Battle of Bunker Hill had been fought and Stiles had become the victim of an obsession. He was striving to believe that five thousand British had taken the field on that occasion and that four thousand of these had been laid low. He was distinctly in a bloody-minded mood. He welcomed Martin not as a co-worker in the Lord's Vineyard but as a stout warrior who had helped maintain the good cause against the hosts of oppression. He was hungry for news and Martin gave him in full measure what he craved. The whiskings of that sanguinary long sword and the disembowelling of Fusileers were eagerly recorded, and the prevalence of discordant Irish and the persistence of cannon balls stirred neither doubt nor humor in his breast. One word of misgiving in his

June entries, a reiteration of his doubt of Martin's "true character," might have put such scholars as Sparks, Bancroft, and Frothingham upon their guard. But to Stiles, Martin in the pulpit and Martin in battle were two distinct personalities. Moreover, it is not certain that this interview was valueless in softening some of Stiles's suspicions engendered by Martin's theological acrobatics and his assertions as to the Pretender's contempt for the Mass. At all events, he did attend the service on the evening of June 30 to hear Martin preach from that militant text in Nehemiah which we have already quoted.

Two years passed and then under date of May 12, 1777, we come upon this entry in the diary of Stiles: "I went to Providence, where this day Rev. Mr. Martin of Irel[d] was taken up by Gen Spencer for a Spy & as hav[s] a Commission from G. Howe." This seems a laconic and unfeeling announcement and then in his entry for the next day, May 13, we read as follows: "At Providence waited on Gen Spencer who told me Mr. Martin had been over to the Enemy in the Jerseys & returned. One Dennison of Stonington informed the General that Mr. Martin had a Major's Commission & offered him a Captaincy. The General sent him off to Windham."

No word of comment escapes Stiles upon this deplorable incident and he gives us no hint as to the fate of the young clergyman who preached for him "all day" on April 16, 1775, and who gave him that excellent

cellent story of Bunker Hill, well calculated to add to the gaiety of nations. Stiles's entry of February 14, 1781, is given over to a discussion "of the new Religionists at Nesqueunia, ten miles N.W. from Albany."* "The whole Number of the Teachers or Heads is Twelve," he tells us, "five males & seven females; three of the males & two fem. profess to be perfect — the other 7 not perfect yet, but far advanced. This pple are Europeans, a part of which came from Engld .... in the year 1774." The head of this new faith was a woman known by the appellation of "the Elect Lady."† Although she asserted that "the Fulness of the Gdhd" dwelt in her and that she was "the Queen of Heaven, Christ's wife," Stiles heard with satisfaction that she with others of her following had been clapped into jail by unsympathizing civil authority. Then says Stiles: "I suspect this dozen profane Europeans with one Mr. Martin a preacher fr Ireland & some others, have been sent over into America by Ministerial Connexions, to excite Confusion and religious Disturbance and propagate principles against fighting and resist^{g} G. Britain; and also to cover themselves with this cloud of religious Dust while they are acting as Spies among us & procur^{g} and faithfully transmitt^{g} political Intelligence to the Enemy."

If I read this last extract from Stiles aright, Martin

* This refers to the earliest Shaker settlement in America at Watervliet, New York.

† The famous Mother Anne Lee.

emained

remained no longer in his estimation as the wielder of that Irish long sword in the cause of liberty on the slopes of Bunker Hill, but as a spy "to propagate principles against fighting and resisting G. Britain."

Who and what was the Reverend John Martin? Was he a Methodist parson or a British spy? Was he in the confidence of Bonnie Prince Charlie? Did he conspire with the followers of "the Elect Lady"? Was he present at Bunker Hill? There may be evidence in existence that throws new light upon these questions but I for one am done with Martin. He has been an engaging companion, I have found him endowed with all the humor and glowing imagination of his race. But the best of friends must part and I am content to leave him at Windham.

V

THE SENSITIVENESS OF GENERAL CLINTON

V

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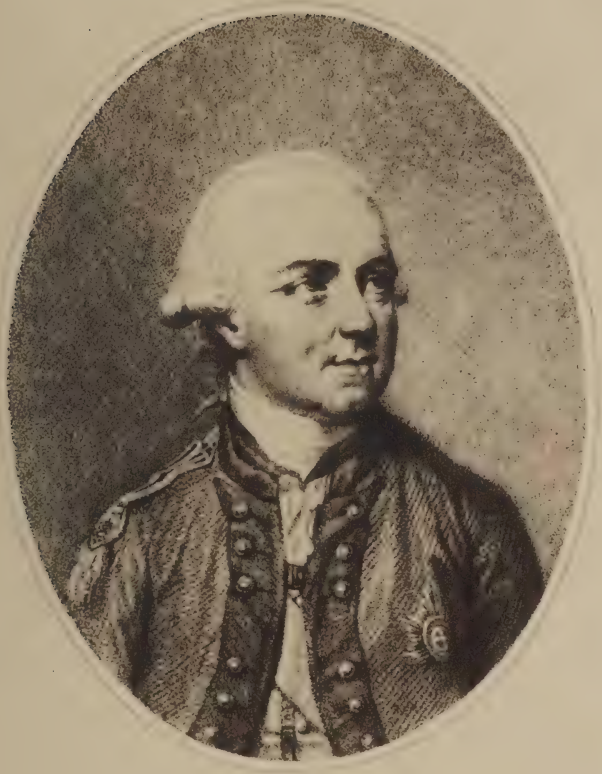
WHILE Howe was landing in Charlestown to attack the American works, Clinton and Burgoyne took their post on Copp's Hill, where the artillery was at work. The little North End eminence was a rare vantage-point for surveying the scene. It is true that the rail fence was not visible from there, and if the generals marked the smoke that arose from behind Breed's Hill they could hardly have appreciated its significance. But the whole Charlestown shore, from the village to Moulton's Point, was in plain view, with the long grassy slopes sweeping up to the crest that was crowned by the American redoubt.

Howe's early order for his reserve was promptly honored and its landing on the beach between the village and the Point may well have attracted the critical attention of our generals. Burgoyne, whose letter to Lord Stanley remains the literary classic on Bunker Hill, waxes enthusiastic over the military preliminaries. "Howe's disposition was exceedingly Soldier-like, in my opinion it was perfect." Then came the request for the burning of Charlestown. "They were exceedingly hurt by musketry from Charlestown," continues Burgoyne, "though Clinton and I did not perceive it until

til Howe sent us word by a boat, and desired us to set fire to the town, which was immediately done; we threw a parcel of shells and the whole was instantly in flames."

The troops were within striking distance of the American works; the smoke of musketry was veiling the hillsides on the farther shore when an event occurred that may well have caused some inquiring comment on Copp's Hill. Another fleet of troop-laden boats came into view making its slow way round the point from the harbor toward the beach where the reserve had landed. These boats contained the 63rd Battalion and Second Marines, ordered over by Gage an eleventh hour reinforcement to the General commanding in the field. Then came Pigot's repulse and what Burgoyne regarded as the critical moment of the day. "Howe's Left were staggered" is Burgoyne's comment. The 63rd and the Marines were then ashore and the eyes of both generals turned naturally in their direction. "We perceived them on the beach," says Burgoyne, "seeming in embarassment which way to march. Clinton then, next for business, took the part without waiting for orders, to throw himself into a boat to head them; he arrived in time to be of service; the day ended with glory."

On June 21 Howe made his report to Gage, warmly commending Clinton for coming "a Volunteer into the action" and for so nobly spiriting on the troops, but remarking also by way of a postscript that "the 63rd



General Sir Henry Clinton

63rd Battalion [and the] 2nd Marines could not get to the field in time to have their share of the success though they marched with the utmost haste as soon as they were landed." He evidently knew nothing at that time of the delay on the beach or of the specific cause that inspired Clinton to cross the river.

On June 23, two days after Howe had submitted his report, Clinton wrote a letter, presumably to the Earl of Huntington. His comments are not only modest but confirmatory of Howe's report. "The Hopes of being of a little service where I thought I saw an opportunity brought me to the assistance of my friend Gen. Howe *en volontaire:* the affair however was in great measure decided on my getting there, and I had little more to do, than offer my assistance and advice wherever that could be of use." Thus far we seem to have a clear understanding of events. Howe tells us the reinforcement arrived too late to share in the action, Clinton that the affair was virtually over when he reached the field.

When H.M.S. Cerberus sailed from Boston for England on June 25, she carried in her mail not only Clinton's letter to Huntington but Gage's report on Bunker Hill addressed to Lord Dartmouth. Now Gage's document was merely a rearrangement and condensation of Howe's account. Phrases and even sentences are transferred bodily from one report to the other. "The Conduct of Major General Howe," writes Gage, "was conspicuous on this occasion, and his example spirited

spirited the troops, in which Major General Clinton assisted, who followed the reinforcement. And in justice to Brigadier-general Pigot, I am to add, that the success of the day must, in great measure, be attributed to his firmness and gallantry." Gage's personal contribution in this statement was confined to the explanatory phrase, "who followed the reinforcement." He had talked with Clinton and probably knew as Howe did not, the episode that was responsible for Clinton's appearance in the field. Of course he never dreamed that in interpolating those four explanatory words he was sowing the seeds of discord and criticism. We must remember in this connection that Clinton did not know what Howe's report contained, and that neither he nor Howe was aware of what Gage had written to Dartmouth.

The Cerberus made a fast passage and before the end of July Captain Chadds placed Gage's letter in the hands of Lord Dartmouth in London. On September 26 the ship dropped anchor again in Boston Harbor and in the Orders of the next day we find the following: "The King has been pleased to Order the Commander in Chief to Express His Majesty's Thanks both to the Officers & soldiers for their Resolution & Gallantry, with which they attacked & Defeated the Rebels on the 17th of June last who had every Advantage of Numbers & Situation & more Especially express to Generals Howe & Clinton & Brigadr. Pigot the Sense His Majesty Entertains of the

the Spirit, Resolution & Conduct by which they Distinguished themselves so much to their Honor upon that Day." This may be said to close the official interchanges regarding Bunker Hill and leaves Howe, Clinton and Pigot basking equally in the warmth of His Majesty's approbation.

In the Clinton papers at Bay City are two letters which serve to reveal not only the atmosphere of the Boston Headquarters but Clinton's state of mind in the early fall of 1775 after he had learned the contents of Gage's report to Dartmouth. The earlier of these is written by Howe to Clinton and is dated Sunday October 8th, or eleven days after the public announcement of the King's thanks to the generals who fought at Bunker Hill. We must assume that just previous to this date Clinton had orally presented his grievance to Howe and made a request which was responsible for the following letter:

Dear Sir

Upon examination of my Report to ye Genl. of ye 17th June, I find ye *words* relative to you were as follows—Viz:—'But I must not close this Report, 'wh I have ye honor of making to you, without 'acquainting you, with the laudable proceeding of 'M. Genl. Clinton, who came a Volunteer into ye 'Action, & spirited on the Troops in ye noblest man-'ner, when they were much harrassed & fatigued by 'the duty of the day. I am Sir, &c—'

Whether

Whether ye Genl. mentioned this in his Report in my words, I know not. But it is certain what he said of you has met w^h^ ye fullest approbation from ye King, by ye Thanks w^h^ he has given to you.

At ye same time I freely confess I condemn myself for not having attended more particularly to you before I gave in ye account to ye General. I can only say in excuse that I imagined those words would not be impertinent upon ye occasion, & wou'd convey ye just sense I had of your good & spirited services on y^t^ day — I am Dr. Sir

W^th^ Truth Y^r^ faithfull
& Most Hum^l^ Ser^t^
W. Howe

Boston
Sunday Oct. 8th 1775

I think it is clear that Howe in this letter was writing under some restraint and that he had little sympathy with the complaint of his distinguished friend who had come unbidden to Breed's Hill to spirit on the troops. He has the King's thanks and what more would he have? Clinton was certainly appeased on reading verbatim the text of Howe's June report to Gage in which his services were so generously and warmly commended. He was doubtless perusing these grateful words on October 9 and had become convinced that Gage by his abridgment of Howe's encomiums had done him not only a serious but an intentional injury. So he dipped his pen in gall and probably in wrath addressed

dressed himself to the unsuspecting Commander in Chief whose baggage was already aboard the Pallas transport that had been awaiting the wind to convey him to England. What he wrote we can only infer from Gage's reply:

BOSTON, *Octr.* 10*th* 1775

SIR,

Your Letter of yesterday gives me much Concern nor can I take my Departure without expressing it particularly after the Conversation I had with you some Days since on its Contents. You surely Sir cannot think me bad enough designedly to put a Person, to whom my Thanks were due, in a Light that should appear disadvantageous to himself or others. Permit me to ask you what steps I ought to have taken to have made out a Relation of the affair on the 17th of June? I applyed for an Account of it to General Howe, you would say nothing of it further than you could not help going over, but had no merit in it, for that the affair was over, the Redoubt taken before you got up. General Howe tells me of his obligations to you and the service you was of in general terms, and from those materials I was to write a Letter. The particulars you now relate I was totaly ignorant of at the time, I could not mention what I did not know. You object particularly to the expression of *following the Reinforcement.* It realy did not strike me at the time and pardon me if I add, that it does not even now in the same way as it does you. But nothing can be alledged on this head, where

where men feel differently and favor different Conceptions of expressions. You will say you are most concerned and must feel the most, believe me your Letter makes me feel likewise. Was you a Man of less worth in your Publick and private Character I should feel less, but I must have Concern in being accused of not doing Justice to a gallant officer, and an amiable and worthy man, whose Friendship and Regard I would study how to cultivate.

Pardon me what I write, for I am too full not to say something in answer to you before I embark, which I propose to do in an hour. Believe me, I entreat you, that I honour and Esteem you, and that I most sincerely wish you Health Happyness, and success in all your undertakings. And that I am most truly

Sir,

Your most obedient
humble servant,
Thos Gage

I think that Gage's character is in some measure revealed in this letter — probably the last that he wrote on American soil. His courage was undoubted, but the stormy atmosphere in which he lived from the spring of 1774 until the fall of 1775 has served to obscure those honest and lovable qualities that made him so faithful an officer and so conscientious a gentleman. If courtesy and consideration could have allayed the rising tide of disorder and rebellion in the province, he would surely

surely have won a bloodless victory. Soldier as he was, he detested any idea of a resort to the sword. His venture of the 19th of April was ill conceived and badly executed and its sanguinary results cut him to the quick. The battle of the 17th of June was forced upon him and he fought to maintain his position in Boston. His conciliatory policy was unappreciated and he was proclaimed a tyrant and the chief of ministerial assassins. Moreover the restraint and patience he exercised toward the rebels and the strict discipline he enforced upon his officers incurred the displeasure of the army. He marked the rising sentiment among the rank and file that the sins of rank rebels were being visited upon the heads of a loyal soldiery and knew that in regimental mess rooms his name was mentioned with a shrug. Let us hope that he did not know that in the King's closet in London he was smilingly damned by the cognomen of "the mild general." Conscious that he was unequal to his task, pestered by impossible instructions from home, and prodded by Major Generals in Boston, the day had come for his release and he was to pass out of the Province House forever. Then came Clinton's ill-timed and inconsiderate protest, and, heavy and sorrowful, he sat down to write his "et tu Brute," to the man whose regard and respect he coveted.

Whatever the details of Clinton's complaint, it is certain that he accused his commander with deliberately minimizing his services at Bunker Hill. It cannot be denied that Gage in condensing Howe's report did also abridge

abridge the praise of Clinton which that report contained. Then there was the phrase about following the reinforcement. This certainly was not condensation but elaboration, and it may be that Gage, as he read and reread Clinton's unwelcome letter, cursed himself for the insertion of those four hapless words. Surely he was as unlucky with his pen as with his sword. Had he added "as a volunteer" it would have been better. Perhaps in June he could not have honestly used "led" for "followed" but it was maddening to think that had he said nothing and avoided that essay in needless elucidation he might have been secure from the reproaches of his troublesome and ungrateful friend. His report to Dartmouth was criticised by the Opposition in Parliament and ridiculed in the public print, but no one at the time detected the slight that Clinton alleged; nor has any writer from that day to this regarded this sensitive officer as anything but honored in the language Gage employed. But in Clinton's letter something new was claimed that drew forth these words from Gage, "the particulars you now relate I was totally ignorant of at the time. I could not mention what I did not know." Particulars of what? That is the tantalizing point in our discussion. Why did Clinton claim so much in October when he had been so modest and reticent in June? If he did write in wrath he may have been tempted into magnifying the value of his services in order to impress his commander with the enormity of his offence. Either in the Clements collection or in the

the Gage papers at Firle we may sooner or later find the text of Clinton's letter of October 9. But whatever it alleges will have finally to be tested by the June evidence, — by Howe's report to Gage, by Clinton's letter to Huntington, and by what Clinton said orally to Gage. We may be sure that Clinton's appearance on Breed's Hill at the close of the battle was helpful and inspiring and this was sufficiently if not fulsomely acknowledged in Gage's report to Dartmouth.

In later years, at some time after the war, Clinton seems to have taken a more rational view of the treatment accorded him by Gage. A change of attitude is suggested by certain entries in his manuscript memoir now in Mr. Clements' possession. In his brief comment on Bunker Hill Clinton states that it would ill become him "to say anything more of the Movements of the Troops employed in the Attack of the Rebels Works than what is contained in the Gazette Account of the Action." He confesses that he exceeded the limits of his orders "by crossing the Water to the Charles Town Side," and assures us that he would have made no allusion to his "volunteer endeavors" they having "been already so favorably spoken of by General Gage & Sir William Howe in their Reports; had it not been for a Mistake which has crept into most of the Publications on the American War." And then he adds these words but later strikes them out; "implying that I properly belonged to the Reinforcement & followed it, which certainly was not the Case." This deleted phrase confirms

firms my suspicion of what was the real basis of Clinton's complaint. It proves at least that he had dreaded from the first that Gage's phrasing would be construed to mean that he, as the duly appointed commander of a reinforcement allowed it to take the field without him. It would also seem that at the time he wrote his memoir no such scandal having been whispered, he came to the conclusion that Gage meant well after all, and so he spoke appreciatively of Gage's praise, and taking his pen in hand he drew it through that mention of his old threadbare grievance.

But in 1794 an event occurred that revived his sensitiveness and stirred his ire. This was the publication of Stedman's "History of the American War" which appeared in the winter of that year. The author mentions the part played by Clinton at Bunker Hill as "most eminently serviceable in rallying the troops, and by *a happy manœuvre* almost instantly brought them back to the charge." Here is mention of a certain specific act that was potent in the achievement of victory and Stedman has long been our only authority for it. The question naturally arises whether the allusion to happy tactics was based upon what Clinton communicated to Gage in October, 1775.

Stedman's "History," as I have said, appeared in 1794. In July of that year Clinton was appointed to the Governorship of Gibraltar and he died there on December 23, 1795. It would seem that from the moment of its publication Stedman's work must have been

been always by Clinton's side. The author was not always complimentary to the Commander-in-Chief in America and before the close of 1794, Clinton found time to publish a caustic pamphlet of "Observations" upon the work. In his first paragraph he informs us again that his volunteer services at Bunker Hill "were amply rewarded by the manner in which Sir W. Howe accepted them." In addition to writing this tract he employed himself in scribbling his comments and annotations upon the margin of map and page in his own copy of Stedman's book, adding new notes from time to time as in memory he refought his American campaigns. Moreover, he laboriously transcribed his notes into other copies presented to or belonging to his friends. The whereabouts of three or four of these can still be traced. In what appears to be Clinton's working copy, the one he had always by him, we find these words written in the margin alongside the account of Bunker Hill. "G. C. saw a moment in wch He thought He might be of use. His volunteer services were acknowledged by G. Howe. The appearance of a Reinforcement Encouraged the one possibly and discouraged the other." Here is no assertion of any conspicuous achievement but neither is there any denial of that mysterious and "happy manœuvre" which is asserted in Stedman's text. In this comment however, Clinton links himself definitely with the reinforcement and we have Howe's statement that it arrived too late to enter the action. It was its "appearance" upon the Charlestown

Charlestown shore that "Encouraged the one possibly and discouraged the other."

As Clinton lay dying at Gibraltar in that Christmas season of 1795, the atmosphere of Europe was charged with war. But I fancy that, while conscious of very present threats and responsibilities, his mind was still running on old wrongs and failures and that it was the echoes of guns fired long ago on American battlefields that were still ringing in his ears.

VI

THE MYTH OF THE ROYAL WELCH FUSILIERS

VI

THE MYTH OF THE ROYAL WELCH FUSILIERS

IN the *Boston News Letter* of August 11, 1774, you will find the following item: "Sunday last, arrived in this Harbour, the Transports from New-York, having on board his Majesty's Royal Regiment of Welch Fuzileers, under the command of Colonel Barnard* (one of the six renowned British Corps, to whose Valor and Intrepidity, the ever memorable Victory at Mendin was gloriously acquired the 1st of August, 1759)."† In this passage we find an echo of the enthusiasm which inspired Boston in the glorious year of "59," when that victory gained upon a far-away Westphalian battle-field was regarded as an occasion for thankfulness and jubilation in the King's most loyal Province of Massachusetts Bay. Only fifteen years had passed, and now the colors of the Fusiliers that had waved so proudly at Minden appeared in the narrow streets of Boston, to be regarded as symbols of oppression and tyranny. Such words as we have quoted from the Boston newspaper must be regarded as the dying expression of a proud and happy memory. The famous Minden regiment, while admittedly the most distinguished corps in the Boston garrison, became by virtue of that preëminence the most conspicuous

*Lieutenant-Colonel Benjamin Bernard. †Page 2/2.

spicuous threat to the cause of American liberty. Elbridge Gerry deplored the moral effect upon his countrymen of such a "sounding name" as Welch Fusiliers.*

The regiment took the field on the day of Lexington with two hundred and eighty-two rank and file, but its presence in the action occasioned no special comment. When, however, after Bunker Hill, it was realized what heavy losses had been inflicted upon the troops, a wave of curiosity swept the American camp as to the fate of that famous corps which had proved its mettle against the much-vaunted infantry of France. We have noticed the effect upon the imagination of the Reverend John Martin, but the interest appears upon every hand, and I shall quote a few comments made directly after the battle that are typical of the public state of mind.

On June 23, 1775, William Tudor wrote as follows to Stephen Collins, the comment being an afterthought jotted in the margin of his letter up and down the sheet: "The Reg't of Royal Welch Fusileers, who were in the Battle of Minden last War, & who piqu'd themselves on their Bravery are ruin'd. It is said the greatest Part of the Privates fell & every Capt. except one. It was in a great measure owing to this Reg't that they were able to carry the Hill."

On June 25, Mrs. John Adams writes to her hus-

*The official name of the regiment is Royal Welch Fusiliers. Except in cases where the full name is given, or where documents are quoted, I have kept to the current spelling of Welsh.

band,

band, "our enemies were cut down like grass before the scythe. But one officer of all the Welch Fusiliers remains to tell his story."*

There is a letter "from a Gentleman in the army," dated June 27, which carries us into the realm of statistics: "*The Royal Welsh Fusileers* have but seventy privates and one Captain left alive."†

On the day following, June 28, General Nathanael Greene wrote as follows: "*the Welch Fusileers*, the finest Regiment in the *English* establishment is ruined; there are but one Captain and eleven privates left in the Regiment."‡

On July 1, the following appeared in the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, and I think in other New England papers: "The Welch Fuzileers were nearly all cut off; only one Captain and 17 Privates it is said remained of that Regiment."

In a "letter from the Camp at Cambridge," dated July 3, we find the following: "The Welch fusileers, the best regiment in the English army, carried from the field no more than 17 privates and one captain." And then the correspondent gives us new matter for reflection — "It is also certain," he says, "that they lost 34 officers."§ The mental processes of this man are clear. With his one captain in hand, he estimated the probable number of officers in the regiment and consigned the balance to the casualty list.

* *Letters*, 3rd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 43–44.
† Force, *American Archives*, 4th Series, II, 1118–19. ‡ *Id.*, II, 1126.
§ *Historical Magazine*, June, 1868, p. 384.

On

On July 8, W. and T. Bradford give us the Philadelphia gossip: "the Welch fusileers have only one Captain and ninety men left out of the whole regiment." Here is new matter recording a depressing increase in the regimental salvage.*

These extracts illustrate the contemporaneous variants of the story. Here is a mass of contemporaneous testimony as to a certain fact, and it still lies in wait to entrap hurried and conscientious students who appreciate the superior value of original sources.

But Bunker Hill did not long remain a popular topic in discussion or correspondence. Courts martial were convened. Anniversary celebrations were omitted. No one cared to contend for the dubious honor of having been prominent in that rash and ill-conducted affair. Jealousy and bitterness possessed provinces as well as individuals and allusions to the battle were almost certain to engender recriminations detrimental to the good of the cause.

Forty-three years of silence had possessed the land when in 1818 General Dearborn burst upon the world with his hazy memories of the battle and his epoch-making assault upon the courage and military behavior of Putnam. Dim recollections of the Fusiliers lingered in his mind. "They came into action," he says, "five hundred strong; and all were killed and wounded but eighty-three." Where Dearborn found his figures or how he could have dreamed in such quantities is, I think,

* London *Chronicle*, August 17–19, 1775.

think, an unsolved mystery, but they proved an inspiration to another New Hampshire man. If you turn to the *Memoirs of General John Stark*, by Caleb Stark, published in Concord, New Hampshire, 1860, you find the following: "The Regiment opposed to the New-Hampshire line was the Welch Fusileers, which had been distinguished at the Battle of Minden, and was considered the finest light infantry regiment in the British army." They "came into the field more than 700 strong, and mustered but 83 on parade next morning."* Dearborn was doubtless Stark's authority, but you will observe that this new writer takes the liberty of recruiting the regiment from a strength of five hundred to more than seven hundred men. As final evidence that "the evil that men do lives after them," it was only recently that an honored member of a New England historical society in addressing his fellows on the services of New Hampshire at Bunker Hill restated the episode for the contamination of history. He maintained the regiment on Stark's establishment of seven hundred men, but was content that the survivors should remain at Dearborn's figure of 83.†

So

* Pages 29, 30.

† The illusion regarding the Fusiliers crept early into American literature. In H. H. Brackenridge's drama of Bunker Hill, published Philadelphia, 1776, we bump over the following lines in the midst of what purports to be heroic verse:

> "The gallant reg'ment of Welsh fusileers,
> To seventeen privates, is this day reduc'd."

Fifty years later James Fenimore Cooper published his *Lionel Lincoln*, and Captain Polwarth, in a dialogue with the hero of the book, is made to say

So much for the legend of the Fusiliers at Bunker Hill; and now for the facts. In the first place, neither Colonel Bernard nor his regiment was in the battle. This is no startling heresy. Mr. Swett doubted the story as far back as 1826,* and Mr. Frothingham, after being long astray, finally saw and asserted the truth in 1875.† All through that hot battle afternoon the men of the regiment, some two hundred and fifty in number, were lounging in their camp on Fort Hill, while the flames from Charlestown swirled high above the steepled skyline of the North End and the air throbbed to the grim music of the guns.

It is true that the two flank companies of the regiment, in common with those of every other regiment in Boston, had been incorporated in the Grenadier and Light Infantry battalions, and so were in the action. These two companies represented a strength of sixty or possibly sixty-five men and were officered by two captains and four subalterns. Captain Blakeney and three of the subalterns were wounded, and forty-six of the privates appeared on the casualty list. Such are the

say, "the Fusileers had hardly men enough left to saddle their goat." An animal of that species, complying with the highest physical requirements, is still, as it has been for nearly two hundred years, the "mascot" of the famous Welsh regiment. To-day, as in 1775, he marches ahead of the drums.

* "From his (Page's) and De Bernier's maps, Mr. Stow, the list of regiments to which the killed belonged, and all authorities, it seems certain that the regiment of Welsh Fusileers was not in the battle." (*History of Bunker Hill Battle*, 2nd ed., 1826, p. 31.)

† "Hence serveral of the regiments — among them the 23d, or Welsh Fusileers — had only their Grenadiers, or Light Infantry Companies, in the battle." (1 *Proceedings*, Massachusetts Historical Society, xiv, 61.)

British

British official figures, but they were disregarded in the days when every one was enthusiastically determined to believe in the extinction of the regiment. There are amusing points of similarity between the guesses and the facts. For instance, the legend has it that the regiment carried but one captain from the field. This is so, for certainly Blakeney was the only captain to be carried or assisted to the rear. Two accounts have it that only seventeen privates were left. If we deduct the casualties of forty-six from a force of sixty or sixty-five, we find our seventeen intact. And yet it was all conjecture of the wildest sort, accompanied by the delusion that the famous Minden regiment had suffered annihilation in the field.

While the fame of the Fusiliers would naturally draw interest and curiosity in their direction, I think there is a more definite basis for the origin of the tale. Howe's first attack on the 17th of June was delivered by eleven companies of Light Infantry belonging to as many regiments. They moved forward in a long, lance-like column on a narrow front, as is plainly shown on De Berniere's map. On this plan, every company being indicated by its regimental number, we find that to the Fusiliers was accorded the honor of leading the advance. Is it not a fair assumption that the Americans, familiar with the uniform and distinctive insignia of the corps, jumped naturally at the conclusion that the whole long column were Fusiliers? When the assault was thrown back, they might well have

have inferred that they had worsted the regiment, and the story passing rapidly from mouth to mouth accumulated the weird statistics and unwarranted elaborations of the sort which gossip provides.*

We laugh at many British estimates of the strength of the Provincial forces at Bunker Hill, estimates based upon a knowledge of Ward's strength at Cambridge and the assumption that his men were all engaged. We may laugh as well at this legend of the Fusiliers with its wild statistics and amusing variants, but, as I have said, I think we may ascribe its birth to the uniform of a few file leaders in a Light Infantry attack.

Of course the legend will persist. It is one of the thrilling stories of Bunker Hill, as solidly entrenched as Mr. Longfellow's version of the midnight ride of Paul Revere. A modest essay like this into the realm of truth cannot prevail against such a time-honored tradition, but at least it furnishes healthful moral exercise for the writer.

Perhaps in coming days of anniversary enthusiasm the old regiment may bleed anew upon the rostrum, to stimulate our love of country. It may be that generations yet unborn will be privileged to hear as well as to read how a handful of their ancestors in homespun overcame and slew those haughty heroes of Minden, the Royal Regiment of Welch Fusiliers.

* An equally plausible explanation is that the men at the rail fence may have mistaken the Grenadiers for the Welsh. The Fusilier regiments wore high fur hats very similar to those of the Grenadiers.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

GENERAL HOWE TO LORD HOWE

THE following letter, written by General Howe to his brother Lord Howe, appears in the Manuscripts of Mrs. Stopford Sackville and escaped my attention until too late to be used in the preparation of this volume. As a private letter of the commander in the action it has greater historical value than his official report to Gage. The reader will notice how completely some of my statistics, compiled from various sources, are confirmed in this document, particularly such as refer to the strength of the British army in the field and that of the various detachments embarking at different times and places. Howe's reference to Pigot's carrying the redoubt "at the second onset," is in entire agreement with Prescott's letter to John Adams, and it converts what I have advanced as a probability into a well-authenticated fact.

1775, *June* 22. *Camp upon the Heights of Charles Town.* In my last of the 13th, I mentioned the General's intentions of occupying Dorchester-neck or Charles Town Heights. And it was determined that the former should be seized, as on Sunday last, the 18th at daybreak: the tide serving well for that time. Everything was prepared accordingly. But on the 17th at daybreak the rebels were observed at work in great numbers upon these Heights, about 1500 yards from the battery mentioned in my last as commanding these Heights from the town of Boston. And it was plainly to be seen that they had thrown up a Redoubt in the night, from whence they could annoy the shipping in the harbour by placing cannon in it covered from the battery by an Epaulment. This work was no sooner observed, than it was determined they must be removed from thence as soon as the troops and boats could be got in readiness for that purpose. And as the shore where it was judged most proper to land was very flat, the landing could not be made with facility after the tide of ebb was much run off. It was, therefore, necessary that no delay should be made in our proceeding, since it would be High Water at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. At about that time the landing was effected without opposition:

sition: the Lively, Glasgow, and Falcon; an armed transport, armed sloop and five floating boat batteries being stationed for the service, which they executed very effectually. The troops we could land together at one disembarkation, in our number and species of boats (not one of our old accustomed flat boats amongst them) were not more than 1100 rank and file, composed of 10 companies of Light Infantry; ten of Grenadiers, with the 5th and 38th Battalions. The second Body, which landed quickly after, was the 43rd and 52nd Battalions; making about 450 addition to the former. With these, followed by some Field Artillery, I went on shore with Brig. General Pigot, and formed my little Corps in three lines, upon a rising spot about 100 yards from the beach. On the first view, it was clearly seen that the rebels were in force and strongly entrenched upon their right, in the Redoubt that had been seen from the town at daybreak; with cannon, and with a large body of troops posted in the houses of Charles Town about 200 yards distant from the right of the Redoubt. Their left and centre were covered by a breastwork (a part of it cannon proof) which reached from the Redoubt to the Mystick, the space from the Redoubt to that river being about 380 yards, and the whole extent they occupied about 600 yards; the left of their line was about 500 yards from our army when we first formed.

From this appearance as well as our observation that they were assembling with all the force they could collect, I applied to General Gage for a reinforcement of troops. This he immediately complied with by sending the Companies of Light Infantry and Grenadiers remaining at Boston, with the 47th Regiment and 1st Battalion of Marines. My strength with this addition amounted to about 2200 rank and file, formed in *two* lines; Brig. Gen. Pigot commanding on the left. We began the attack by a sharp cannonade from our field pieces and two Howitzers, the lines advancing slowly, and frequently halting to give time for the artillery to fire. The Light Infantry on the right were directed to keep along the beach (shore of the Mystick) and to force the left point of

of the rebels breastwork; and then to take them in flank. The Grenadiers were directed to attack the left of the rebels' line, in front, supported by the 5th and 52nd Regiments. These orders were executed with great perseverance, the rebels by their great superiority of numbers keeping up a heavy fire as soon as the line was advanced within distance of their shot. The intermediate space between the two armies was cut by fences, formed of strong posts and close railing, very high, and which could not be broken readily. Had they not been in our way, the rebels would have been quickly forced upon their left, without any great loss on our side. Upon our left, Pigot met with the same obstructions in his advance to the attack of the Redoubt; as well as from the troops in the town, which last alone would have given him sufficient employment, had it not been set on fire by order, at this critical time, with a Carcass from the battery upon the Town Hill at Boston. This relieved Pigot from the difficulty upon his left, and he carried the Redoubt in a very handsome manner, at the *second* onset, tho' it was most obstinately defended to the last, thirty of the rebels having been killed by bayonets within it. It was my opinion that the defeat of the rebels could be ensured by the success of either of the two attacks. The carrying of the Redoubt needs nothing more to be said of it, but that the spot on which it was placed commanded all round it, and if the attack of the right had succeeded, the rebels in the Redoubt would have been turned. But tho' at length when we succeeded in both, the soldiers were so much harrassed, and there were so many officers lost, that the pursuit was not followed with all the vigor that might be expected."

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Reduced from the British Map.

REFERENCES TO THE PLAN
A. 10 Compt of Gren.rs 10 D.o of Light Inf.t & 2 Batt.s in 3 Lines.
B 1.st Detachment behind a Stone Wall
C Light Inf.y moved forward covered by a break in the Ground
D The Batt.s moved forward from the Stone Wall & joined by another from the Lines. being covered by the rising of the Hill from the fire of the Redoubt.
E. F A Hedge being part of the Rebels Defences only Musket proof.
G Redoubt & Intrenchment proof against our Field Pieces.
H 1.st Situation of our Field Pieces with the direction of their fire
I Artillery moved forward. the 1.st direction of the Fire shewn in dotted Lines.
I. F Fire of the Artillery against the Hedge F. to cover the Attack upon their Left.
K The Order our Troops would probably have Attack'd in had our L.t Inf.y been able to penetrate.
L Light Infantry advancing to the Attack of the Point.
M.M Grenadiers taking Ground to the Left of the L.t Inf.y which had not been able to force the Enemy
N The principal Fire of the Artillery was directed from this Point against the Hedge F
O. O The 43.d & 52.d Reg.ts after having inclined to the Left to leave an Interval for the Artillery
P. P The 5.th & 38.th Regiments.
2 The 47.th Regt & Batt.n of Marines disembarked near the Right of Charles Town, after it was Evacuated & assisted in the Reduction of the Redoubt.
NOTE. The post Rows first forced by the Grenadiers & Regiments immediately opposite to it which had for some time before formed our Line in order to return the Enemy's Fire.
MISTICK River
BREED'S HILL
Road from Cambridge
Road to Boston
Rebels Forces
School Hill
CHARLESTOWN
Landing place for Provisions
Ferry Road to Boston
Road to Lechmere Point
CHARLES RIVER
Lively
Falcon
Ship Yard
PART OF
Corps Hill Redoubt and Battery
BOSTON
A PLAN OF THE ACTION AT
BUNKER'S HILL,
on the 17th of June 1775
BETWEEN HIS MAJESTYS TROOPS
UNDER THE COMMAND OF M.r GENERAL HOWE
AND THE REBEL FORCES
By Lieut.t PAGE of the Engineers
Who acted as Aide de Camp to General Howe in that Action.
Scale of Yards
25 50 100 150 200 400 600 800

[Note. In the British Map the names of Bunker's & Breed's Hills are reversed – an error which has been perpetuated]

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